

animals&men

THE JOURNAL OF THE CENTRE FOR FORTEAN ZOOLOGY



GUYANA EXPEDITION REPORT

The Bennington Triangle; Chinese lake monsters; big cats in Devon; Weird Weekend report; new owlman sighting... And more

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EDITORIAL



Dear friends,

After so many years living in the city, one forgets what winter in the countryside is like. Ok it is still cold, wet, and grey, but it has a sort of stern beauty which one completely forgets about when one lives in the city. Sitting here at my computer in my study, I can look out of the window at the winter landscape before me, and feel ever more disoriented as I edit and typeset Richard's accounts of nearly dying of heatstroke on the savannah grasslands of southern Guyana.

We went up to the pub the other night, and as we walked back through the chilly winter's rain, his account of how he felt that his brain was boiling inside his skull.

I am so proud of the Guyana team it is not true. Once more, the CFZ expeditionary force have gone through amazing hardships which would quite literally kill many people here in the west (and I include myself in that). And why do they do it? Purely and simply to advance the sum totals of human knowledge.

Nobody involved with this organisation does it for the money, or for the perks, and one thing that has made me very angry in recent months is that I have been told from various sources that one of the more vocal members of the fortean community has been stating - in public, no less - that the CFZ is a big fraud, and that the only reason that we mount expeditions is to get free foreign holidays.

That is so untrue that it is a complete insult.

Firstly, this is the first expedition we have done that we didn't have to pay for ourselves, and secondly, from the reports that you can all read, the rigours of these expeditions are so great that in order to do this purely for fun, one would have to be a complete masochist!

The CFZ is one of the only organisations in the world who set out to expand the frontiers of human knowledge with no financial agenda whatsoever. Most mainstream scientific endeavours are funded by people within the Military-Industrial complex, who are seeking information which will help with whatever projects they are currently engaged upon.

But enough of my ranting.

It has been a pretty good year here at the CFZ. Two recent projects that I would recommend to you are the 2008 CFZ Yearbook which is being published concurrently with this issue, and our new monthly web tv show 'On the Track'.

Each episode is about fifteen minutes long, and appears in the first week of each month. The latest episode (#3) features news on the South China tiger, Atlas bear, Babary lion and leopard, new and rediscovered animals, and - of course - some exclusive video from the Guyana expedition.

Thanks for your support during 2007. Next year looks even more exciting.

Jon Downes
(Director, CFZ)

"THE GREAT DAYS OF ZOOLOGY ARE NOT DONE"

THE FACULTY OF THE CENTRE FOR FORTEAN ZOOLOGY



"In her abnormalities, nature reveals her secrets." (Goethe)

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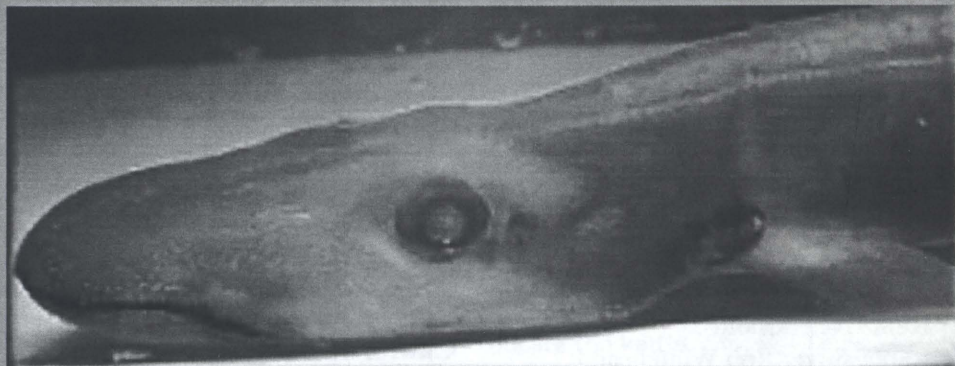
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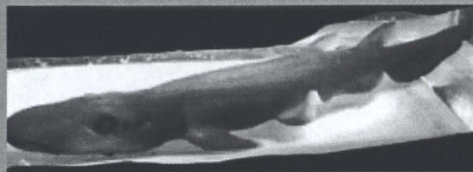
NEWSFILE

Edited and compiled by Oll Lewis and Jonathan Downes



NEW SHARK COMES THOUGH THE KEAHOLE

Another new species has turned up in the deep-sea filtration systems off Keahole point Hawaii. A small shark that is described as looking similar to an alligator follows the discovery 2 months previously of a creature that looked like a hybrid between an octopus and a squid (A&M 41:6). The shark was sucked up from seawater 1km below the surface into a 1.30m deep seawater tank designed to save specimens from the oceans depths that inadvertently make their way into the pumping system. (Although it usually doesn't).



Unusually the shark survived the ordeal where many other animals sucked up by the pump have been killed by the sudden pressure-change.

The shark survived in the tank for five days and was filmed swimming

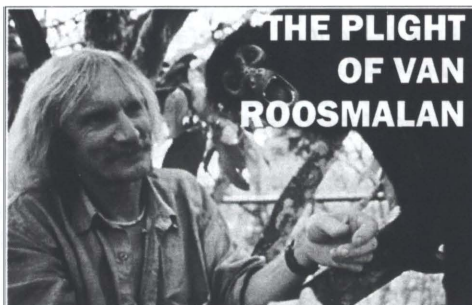
NEW AND REDSCOVERED

around in no apparent distress. Photographs and film of the shark were sent to several marine life and shark experts, many of whom believe it to be of an undocumented species. It has some similarities in appearance to the sponge-head cat shark (*Apristurus spongiceps*), known from only two specimens found off the coast of Indonesia in depths between 500m-1.500km. The Keyhole shark has a much shorter snout than *A. spongiceps* and different shaped fins.

KEEP YOUR PECCARY UP

A new species of peccary has been found in the Amazon by Dutch biologist Marc van Roosmalen. Van Roosmalen was undertaking field research on local monkeys when he spotted the animals:

"One day I was looking at some monkeys, and I saw three peccaries



THE PLIGHT OF VAN ROOSMALAN

There are few heroes in the world of science these days, and as the years go by their numbers dwindle still further, many scientists prefer sitting in a nice warm and comfortable laboratory or a slightly rainy but ultimately safe hill in Snowdonia. While their work is worthy and important it can very rarely be called exciting or heroic. Marc Van Roosmalen is a different sort of animal, a true hero of Ecology, Zoology and Animal conservation. The expert primatologist uses a number of methods cryptozoologists would be familiar with when searching for new species as part of his study of primates in largely unexplored areas of the Amazon Rainforest, and he and his team have identified a stunning number of new species. These include seven species of primate, a new species of peccary and two new species of tree.

This success has unfortunately brought about jealousy on the part of other scientists and anger from logging companies, otherwise known as the vile faeces in human form who want to cut down the rainforest for their own personal monetary gain, and it is alleged that rival scientists and logging companies have reported him to police for misappropriation of funds from the Brazilian government and unlicensed export of biological specimens of orchids and monkeys. He has recently been sentenced to 16 years in prison for this in Brazil. It is an open secret that this came about as a result of bribes from Logging companies and soya producers, because of Van Roosmalen's high profile campaigning against them and the allegations against Roosmalen are either false or a result of misunderstandings.

Pass in front of me totally silent. They appeared and then disappeared without making any noise. Later, I asked the locals what I had seen. It shows that you really have to see things and then ask people what you've seen. They are not going to tell you otherwise. It's normal to them. It turns out to be their most hunted animal."

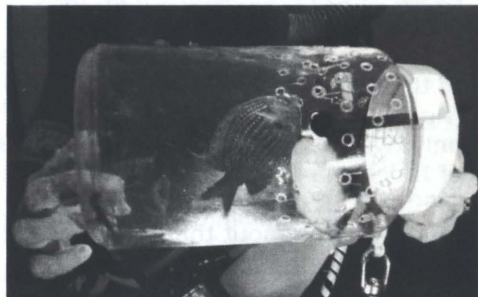
Local Indians in the Rio Aripuanã basin call the animal Caitetu Munde, which means "*great peccary which lives in pairs.*"

The Peccary was confirmed to be a new species after genetic analysis at the Leiden Centre for Environmental Sciences in the Netherlands and after analysis of measurements of the animals body and skull. The peccary also has longer legs, in proportion to its body and different fur markings to other species.

The animal is the largest known species of peccary and has been given the name *Pecari maximus*.

Unlike other peccary species *P. maximus* lives in very small family groups of less than 5 individuals, eats fruit from trees and does not root for food. It does not scent mark its territory, unlike other species, which Van Roosmalen postulates is to make the small groups harder for big cats and other predators to track.

YOU ARE ENTERING THE TWILIGHT ZONE



Over 20 new species of fish have been found on a deep-sea diving expedition to uncharted areas of the Micronesian nation of Palau in the Pacific Ocean. The expedition, which was funded by the British Broadcasting Corporation for the television series 'Pacific Abyss' sent divers into the largely ignored zone between depths of 50m and 150m. Here the divers explored cave systems and wrecks near the Chuuk island group.

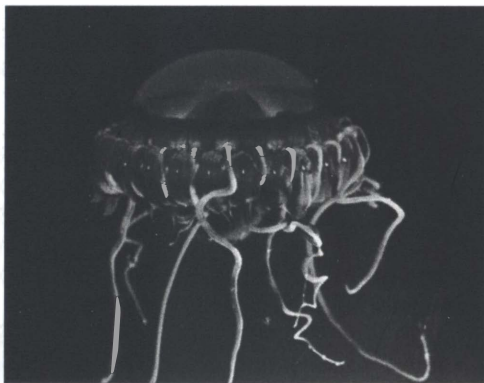


The caves are at the limits skilled Divers can dive to using the most advanced diving apparatus available. One particular cave, named 'The Temple Of Doom' is littered with the skeletons of sea turtles and several unfortunate divers who were not able to escape the caves before their oxygen ran out. Researchers were thrilled as the divers brought up new species after new species. One gushed, *"Every one of the fish in this bucket is a new species. That doesn't happen! It may have done 200 years ago but not today."*

Dr John Copely, a marine biologist from Southampton University was also thrilled by the expeditions finds saying "this news really demonstrates how exciting it is to explore the ocean. They could have come across new species of snails corals and sponges. There is still so much left to explore and even more as you go even deeper."

TITANIC TEAM'S CELEBES SEA FINDS

Scientists from the Woods Hole Oceanographic institution in Massachusetts, USA have found several new species in the Celebes Sea south of the Philippines. The area where they searched was in the centre of an area known as the 'Coral



triangle', bordered by the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia, that has long been known as an area of high biodiversity.

The team, several members of which were involved in the discovery of the wreck site of the Titanic, used a remotely operated camera vehicle to explore depths of up to 2.730km (9,100ft). Among the discoveries was a new species of jellyfish that was coloured black, a transparent sea cucumber and a new species of worm.



The worm was orange in colour, spiny and had 10 tentacles similar to a squid.

Project leader, Dr Larry Madin, said that he thinks the worm may be something completely new. Madin believes that there are a lot more new species to be found in the area because it is almost completely geographically isolated and postulates that a lot of species that are currently common in the worlds oceans may have first evolved and spread out from the Celebes Sea.

BACK-TERIA FROM THE DEAD IN ANTARCTICA

Captain Scott described Antarctica's freeze dried deserts as "valleys of the dead" when he first saw them on the ill-fated 1910 'race to the pole'. However despite appearances there is life in these valleys, where it is too cold even to snow. Bacteria have lain dormant frozen in the ice for thousands and, in some cases, millions of years.

Some of these bacteria from ice samples taken from the ice valleys have recently been revived and cultured by a research team from Rutgers University. The team also obtained DNA samples making the Bacteria the oldest ever to have been revived and oldest DNA samples ever obtained.

Samples from 100,000 year old ice were able to double in numbers after seven days, which is very slow when compared to the eight minutes usually taken to archive this by modern bacteria that has not been dormant.

The older bacteria from 8,000,000 year old ice samples took even longer to double in numbers taking around two months. The results of this study indicated that over time in dormancy the DNA responsible for reproduction



in the bacteria had become damaged according to one of the researchers, Dr Kay Bidle. From the results of the study the scientists were able to discover the half life of bacterial DNA is approximately 1.1million years.

The study also disproves the theory that life began on earth after being seeded by bacteria from a comet. The degradation of DNA in the ice samples is a result of cosmic radiation and this would be even more pronounced in a comet that does not have the protection of a planet and its atmosphere to weaken and refract cosmic radiation. In the time it would take a comet to reach Earth it would have become sterile eons ago.

Dr Bidle is optimistic that any bacteria trapped in Martian ice could be revived using the same techniques.

However Russell Vreeland of the university of West Chester was unimpressed by the findings believing the experiment to have been flawed and open to possible contamination from much younger microbes.

Previously the oldest DNA recovered from microbes were from 800,000 year old samples from an ice sheet in Greenland by researchers from the University of Copenhagen earlier this year.

NEVER A FROWN WITH GOLDEN ANURAN



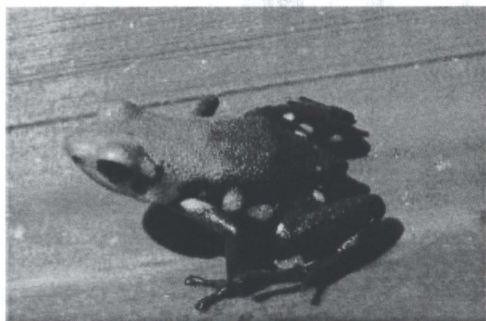
In recent months two anuran species have made scientific headlines; one a rediscovery of a tree frog believed extinct in Costa Rica (giving fresh hope for the survival of the golden toad) and another a golden frog species new to science. Zoologist Andrew Grey recently found a metallic brown-green tree frog in Costa Rica. As he closely examined it he realised that it was *Isthomhyla rivularis* a species that, like the golden toad of Costa Rica, was thought to have been made extinct by global warming.

Grey, a curator at Manchester Museum, described the discovery; *"We were walking through the forest at night when I heard a frog call I didn't recognise. I've been visiting and working in Costa Rica for years and specialise in tree frogs, so when I heard the unrecognisable call from a*

high branch I knew I'd have to climb up the moss-covered trunk in my Wellingtons and find out what it was. One look at the specimen in my hand and I knew I had caught something very special."

Isthomhyla rivularis was last seen in the 1980s when changing climate and explosions in fungal populations caused a crash in the amphibian population. Grey took several photographs of the tree frog before returning it to the wild and hopes to set up a breeding program when he returns to Costa Rica next year.

As well as the Costa Rican discovery, a new species of poison dart frog was recently identified by scientists working in conjunction with the conservation leadership program. The new species has been named 'the golden frog of Supatá' and is found only in a 20Ha area in Cundinamarca in Columbia.



**IT DOESN'T EXIST!
OH WAIT THERE IT IS.**



Biologist Jake Esselstyn from the university of Kansas, USA, was surveying forest life with a team of researchers on the island of Mindoro in the Philippines when a local guide told him about a strange species of bat he had seen in the area. The local described the bat in great detail to Esselstyn and the scientist politely explained to him that such a bat did not exist.

Esselstyn was proved wrong however when a few days into his research he happened upon a new species of bat, exactly as had been described by the guide.

Slightly shamed for having dismissed the local's description so readily when he first heard it the only thing the scientist felt he could offer in his

defence was that the bat's closest known related species is found 1,200km (720 miles) away in Indonesia.

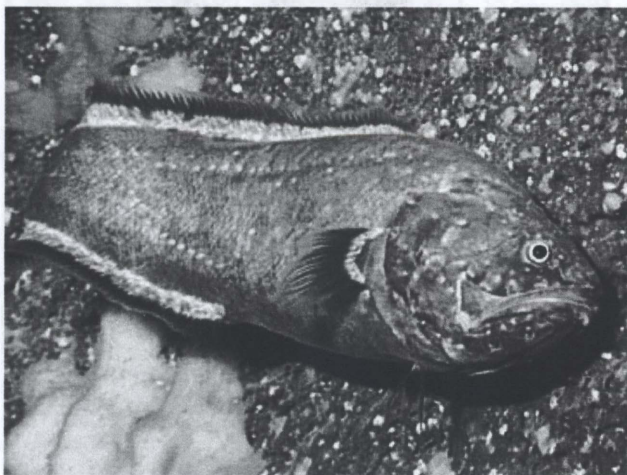
Esselstyn now speculates that there may be several other similar species of bat undiscovered on islands between the two species. The bat, which Esselstyn has named 'the Mindoro stripe-faced fruit bat' has been described as being a flying fox with orange fur and distinctive white stripes across the brow and jaw.

FIND THE FISH

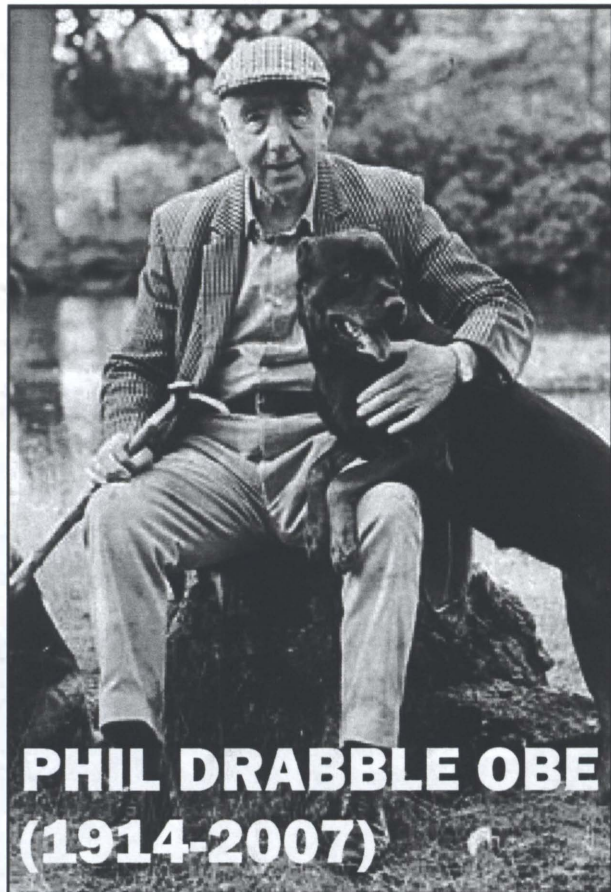
Nine years ago marine biologist, Marc Hughes, spotted a six-inch long brown fish he had never seen before while diving in an underwater cave in South Kona, Hawaii studying micro-molluscs. At the time he did not catch the fish, but took photographs, and when he checked up on the fish to identify it he found no records of a fish matching the description in the area. Hughes presented his photographs of the fish to John E. Randall, a tropical fish expert at Bishop Museum, who confirmed that the fish was a new species of the genus *Grammonus*, but could not

take classification any further without a type specimen.

Earlier this year Hughes found the fish again after keeping an eye open for nearly a decade of diving. He caught the fish and popped it in his pocket before sending it to Ohau for identification via a tropical fish dealer. As it was dead when it arrived, the dealer being, allegedly, a pillock threw the fish out before sending it on seeing no value in a dead fish. Hughes obtained a second specimen on the 21st of July that was X-rayed by Randall. Another specimen was obtained shortly after this by Biologist Bronson Nagareda off the coast of Waianae who sent the specimen to Randall. The fish has a down-turned mouth and back fins similar to that of an eel.



OBITUARIES



**PHIL DRABBLE OBE
(1914-2007)**

British naturalist, writer and broadcaster Philip Percy Cooper Drabble was probably best known as the presenter of the BBC sheepdog trials television show "One man and his dog". One man and his dog was a hugely entertaining program watched by millions in its heyday and this was thanks, in part, to Drabble's commentary.

Drabble was not only a commentator however, he was a naturalist who loved the countryside. He was particularly fond of his native Staffordshire where he and his wife Jess, who he married in 1939, ran their wildlife reserve and he wrote his books on the countryside that were to bring him to the attention of producer Phillip Gilbert when looking for a rural presenter for one man and his dog.

Drabble when asked to describe the appeal of one man and his dog said "One Man and His Dog is a refreshing change from the incessant sex, violence and politics spewed over our television screens, nice people obviously enjoy it because it is wholesome and feeds their nostalgia for the deep values of true country folk, for a life in which craftsmanship has not yet been obliterated by the wonders of our technological revolution."

As a young man Drabble had studied medicine at Oxford and planned to become a GP like his father, but switched to an engineering course in London after two years of study.

London didn't meet his expectations, he described it as "uncivilized" and he returned to Bilston in Staffordshire to work in a factory job his father had arranged for him. He later started work for spring manufactures, Salters in West Bromwich where he stayed for 23 years and made it

to the board of directors.

It was in 1941 while working at Salters that Drabble started writing for countryside magazine "The Field" which he continued to write articles for until 1989. When the editor of the field, Brian Vesey-FitzGerald, moved to publisher Robert Hale he commissioned Drabble to write a book about Staffordshire in 1948 and this was followed by a book about the Black Country in 1952.

Vesey-FitzGerald also convinced Drabble to present a feature on local radio about bullrings and stakes in the black country in 1947 that was to be the first of many radio and later television appearances for Drabble. He left Salters in 1960 to pursue broadcasting full time and two years later he and Jess bought a derelict cottage and 90 acre woodland to turn into their nature reserve. The Drabbles used a habitat management approach which was an example they hoped others would follow. Today habitat management is considered the most effective method of conservation but in the 60s conservation of this type was almost in its infancy so they should be commended for their far-sightedness.

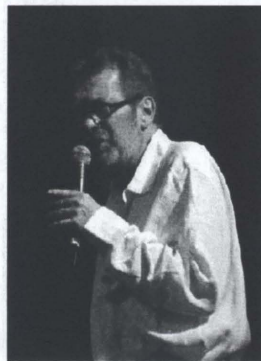
TONY WILSON (1950-2007)

Tony Wilson gained a degree in English in 1971 and went on to become a reporter for Granada Television in Manchester. Although well known as a reporter, his credits included *World in Action*, Granada news and several trail blazing late night talk shows, he is best remembered as one of the co-founders of Factory Records and the owner of Manchester's famous Hacienda nightclub. Factory Records were responsible for some of the defining bands of the 'Madchester' music and cultural scene. These bands included 'Joy Division' and 'The Happy Mondays'. Despite the success of Factory Records and the Hacienda Wilson made

very little money from these ventures due to the high production costs involved and the fact that most people enjoying a night out at the Hacienda spent their money on E rather than drinks at the bar. Many people would have given up because of this but Wilson kept the company a-float as long as it was possible because of his genuine passion for the music. He made several attempts to revive factory records, most recently with online distribution under F4, but none of these subsequent companies were able to match the success of the original factory records.

It was practice, and an in-joke, at factory records to give every item they produced or were involved in a catalogue number by which it was referred to. This ranged from 'normal' things such as single and album releases and the semi-fictionalised bio-pic '24 Hour Party People' (FAC 401) to the Hacienda itself (FAC 51), the Hacienda's cat (FAC 191) and a law-suit (FAC 61). When Tony Wilson was denied the drugs he needed to prolong his life while suffering from renal cancer by the NHS a number of his friends in the record industry and media clubbed together to finance his treatment, he died of a heart attack in August 2007.

When news of Wilson's death was publicly released the Union Flag on Manchester Town Hall was lowered to half mast as a sign of respect for the man who had been an enthusiastic ambassador for his beloved city wherever he went. His funeral was held in the city and a brass plate was affixed to his coffin with the final factory records catalogue number: FAC 501: Tony Wilson, his funeral and his coffin.





MYSTERY CATS DIARY

Corinna Downes

The woods at Huddisford - a hamlet a couple of miles from CFZ headquarters here in rural North Devon have been the site for a whole string of big cat sightings in recent years. Jon has been visiting these woods for well over thirty-five years now - man and boy - and knows them reasonably well. As you will know, such sightings are, of course, widespread across the country these days, but in view of Di Francis' talk at this year's BCIB conference, we have started to look into them a little more diligently.

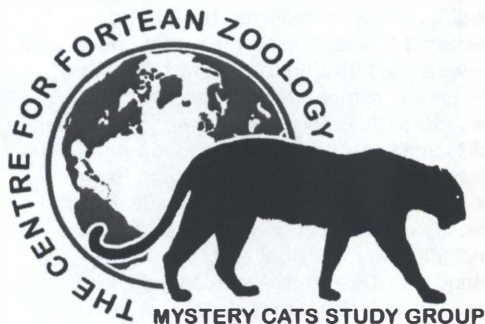
Most of the cats seen are black; stocky beasts with the head and shoulders of a mastiff, but in the early spring and late winter of each year there are reports of a brown animal. The most recent sighting of the creature was in March this year, which if Di is right (and it has to be said that she has been right a heck of a lot of the time) is the female.

Jon happened to meet the witness in the Village Shop a few weeks later, and she told him of the lithe brown animal, with a puglike face, which so confused her that she didn't know whether it was a big cat or some weird dog.

So, you can imagine our excitement

when, on Sunday, 15th July, just as I was settling down to watch the spuds laboriously come to the boil on my rather slow-cooking free-standing electric rings and listen to the sausages sizzling in the oven whilst they did so, we received a telephone call to say that there had been a big cat sighting in Huddisford Woods. Leaving the culinary goings-on in the kitchen to their own devices (with a little help from Oll, my eldest daughter and her fiancé) Jon, Richard and I went off to investigate the area in question, and to interview the chap who had seen the creature.

Just before 6.00 pm, Mr. Harris had been disturbed by the loud squawking of his chickens in a field next to his home. From past experience, he recognised that their sudden loud calls meant there was something



amiss, so he went to investigate. He saw a large animal lying down in some long grass under a low-growing tree, about 25 feet from where he was standing, and realised that it was no ordinary dog or cat. When it saw him, it bounded off across the field, in the general direction of the dense wood that bordered the area, but not before Mr. Harris identified it as a large black cat. He said he estimated it as being 8 feet in length. He showed us where it had been laying under the tree there was a large area of flattened grass. It was obvious, by the tracks left in the long grass, where the animal had taken large strides across the field to escape its discovery.

As it bounded away from him, Mr. Harris lost sight of it from where he was standing, but we followed the tracks they were around 12 feet apart - and it seemed apparent that it had jumped through a hole in the hedgerow, which led straight into the darkness of the wood behind it. Apparently, this is a well-used passage

to and from the wood there is a distinct gap and, by the flattened undergrowth around it, is clearly a well-used route to and from the wood. Mr. Harris told us that he often gets deer in his field that access it from this very gap.

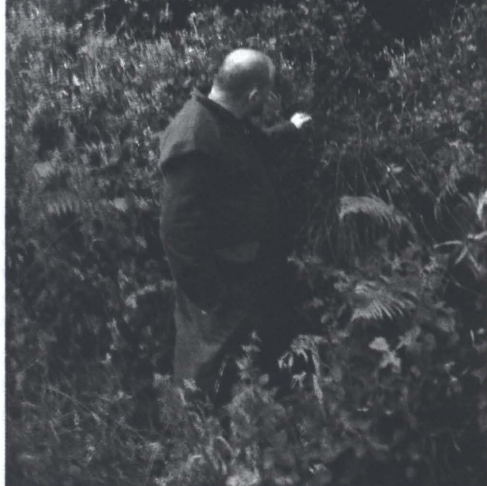
Mr. Harris was a very nice chap, interesting to talk to, and we spent a good half to three quarters of an hour chatting to him and photographing the tracks left by his visitor. He said that he had first seen a black cat in the area around 2 years previously; this first sighting being of a brown or black creature. Mr. Harris told us that, on this evening, the animal was also of a dark colour. Richard also found some hairs on a bramble by the supposed exit route, and he took these to be stored safely away until we could send them off for analysis.

The impression left by the creature was definitely larger than a domestic cat much larger. Besides this, as mentioned above, there have been many sightings over recent years in Huddisford Woods, and most that have been reported seem to come from the same particular area, so perhaps there is, indeed, one or more of these creatures in the locale.

There is also another place, quite close by, that several people have seen a big cat. We drove through it on our way home - a very eerie



Richard points to where we found the hair. Once again, Jon's walking stick is invaluable.




department than when we had left, and I once again settled down to the lazy bubble of the potato water and the sizzling porkers in the oven. I tell you what though, I really enjoyed my dinner that night my mother always says that a dose of country air builds up the appetite and I have to agree with her.

In late October, however, we received news that the hairs were, in fact, from a dog, which was a bit disappointing, although not really unexpected due to the obvious animal traffic that uses the route that the cat had been thought to take into the woods.

place. Nothing much to note about it. It's just a road that dips into a small valley, over a tiny Devonshire bridge, and then up again.

However, there is something very unsettling about it. Driving through it, I felt quite anxious almost to the point of the hairs standing up on the back of my neck. A minute or so later, after leaving the area, all felt well again. Very odd and definitely not a place I would like to walk home by myself late at night in fact, I would not even fancy driving through it by myself. It oozed a sense of doom - I wonder why that is? Strange how some areas can give you a real sense of dread as you pass through them, for no apparent reason at all.


We got back to the cottage, a little damper around the feet

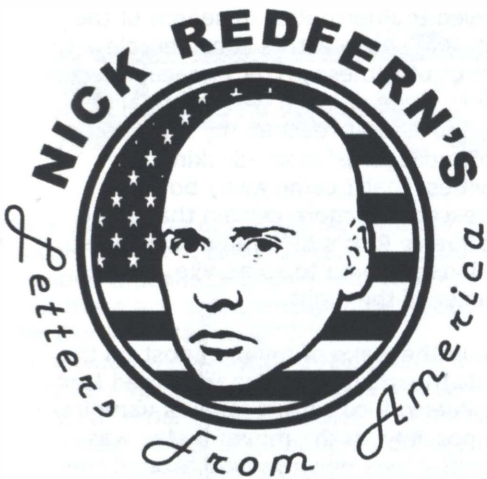


HAVE YOU SEEN THE BIG CAT?

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, OVER A DOZEN PEOPLE HAVE REPORTED SEEING THIS ANIMAL IN - OR NEAR - HUDDISFORD WOODS.

WE ARE CARRYING OUT AN IN-DEPTH RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE ANIMAL, AND WOULD BE VERY INTERESTED TO HEAR FROM ANY WITNESSES. PLEASE TELEPHONE US IF YOU HAVE SEEN IT. 01237 431413





In early April 2007, I set up a new blog titled *There's something in the Woods* that was dedicated to informing people of my States-side monster-hunting activities, and that would also alert people to what the CFZ was up to on the other side of the Atlantic.

One of the benefits of this particular excursion was that it brought in a wealth of never-before-seen accounts from people who were keen to share with me - and with everyone else - the details of their own monstrous encounters. And, with that in mind, I thought that now would be a good time to alert you to some of the highlights of those many and varied accounts that have swarmed into the offices of CFZ-USA (well, okay, we don't exactly have offices yet here in sunny, gun-happy Dallas, but we are getting there...).

One of those people was John Weatherly, who told me only days after the blog was launched:

"I am British and live in Florida. My family and I came to Florida by sea from Australia in 1969. Our ship left Acapulco and sailed along the west coast towards

the Panama Canal. It was the first week of July 1969. The sea was calm and we were cruising quite slowly because of congestion in the canal.

"As we cruised along the west coast of Costa Rica and Panama we were about 7 or 8 miles from shore and just a few yards from the flotsam line. It was clearly defined line of sea weed about 30 feet wide with odd bits of wood and the occasional small tree limb, "We cruised along this path for several hours in bright sunshine between about 10 AM and 2 PM. There were many fish visible and some very large turtles but the significant sighting was huge eels. These creatures were always in pairs and we saw a pair perhaps every 20 minutes or so.

"They averaged about 15 feet long and had a diameter of about 1.5 feet. They were khaki or olive in color and were identical to the eels for which I used to fish as a boy in my home town of Canterbury Kent, except they were so large. They were lazily swimming very slowly along through the flotsam or just wallowing at the very surface.

"The ship was carrying about 1200 passengers and most were on deck on this idyllic day so the eels were seen by many people. Most were engaged in counting the enormous numbers of sharks which were clearly visible around the ship. "I wonder if you have any idea what species of eel these were? They could easily have swallowed a child or a small adult."

I wondered, too; and I duly sent John a bunch of photos of eels known to inhabit the waters in question, but he advised me that the beasts he saw were far stranger in nature:

"Thanks for the inputs, Nick.

BEASTS OF THE BLOG

"Unfortunately they did not add a great deal to the identity of the eels that I and my fellow passengers saw all those years ago. The images are still very clear in my mind's eye. I am not much of an ichthyologist or zoologist for that matter, being a retired communications engineer by profession, so I can only speculate and very possibly be in error. However I would suggest that since we only saw these creatures in pairs that possibly they had come to the surface for mating as I believe do some other relatively deep water species?

"Also, every moray eel picture that I have ever seen usually depicted a fish with a spotted or patterned body. These were not like that but a uniform smooth light khaki or even green/mustard color. Also the snout of the moray is quite pronounced. If memory serves me correctly the ones we saw had a more rounded nose. I do not recall the eyes being specifically prominent either although we are now stretching my memory a bit. I only wish I had access to a good telescopic lens for my camera at the time." Indeed, having heard John's story, so did I. Whatever the true identity of the giant eels of the Panama Canal, it seemed they were destined to remain a mystery.

The reports, however, continued to flood in. Several days after receiving John Weatherly's account, I wrote an article for the blog on the diabolical and vampire-like Chupacabras of Puerto Rico. The Chupacabras was a strange and macabre entity: it was described as looking like a big, glowing-eyed monkey, with razor-sharp claws, vicious fangs and according to some a pair of large, bat-like wings.

On two occasions, as I detailed in my book *Memoirs of a Monster Hunter*, I had

traveled to Puerto Rico in search of the beast and spoke with a considerable number of witnesses to Chupacabras attacks. Indeed, such was the quality of the reports that reached my attention of the Chupacabras' blood-sucking activities, that I came away both impressed and more certain than ever that Puerto Rico's El Yunque rain-forest was indeed home to some vile, winged monster of the night.

And, in the wake of my blog post on the beast, I learned from a man named Mac that Puerto Rico's most famous vampire was possibly on the move: if Mac was correct, it was now roaming around the wilder and sometimes not so wild parts of the United States' mainland, too.

As Mac told me: "I find the possibility of the Chupacabras particularly interesting, as it is the cryptid I may have gotten a brief glance at. During the Florida drought of 2001 I lived on a farm with my ex-wife. Many of the trees were in great distress because of the heat and dry conditions. One had nearly fallen over on my house. In an effort to help cool and water them I was out spraying down their trunks during the hottest part of the day. I was using a pressure nozzle with some real power.

"At one point the stream went into an open cavity and out popped two very unhappy looking creatures the like of which I have never seen before. Rather large, especially given the size of the hole they emerged from, about three feet long, they gave much the appearance of a primate and moved like one. Their shoulder looked strong even bulky. They had flat faces, and I remember they seemed to be squinting against the light. "Most curious of all, from their arms to their legs stretched a thick membrane much like a bat. They

were startlingly white. It could be said that these were just a large albino bat, in and of itself that would be quite a sighting. However, the largest bat in North America is called The Western Mastiff bat which in the US is only found in southern California, and the body of which is only a foot and a half long.

"Honestly, as someone who has studied wildlife science, the size of the wings doesn't seem large enough to carry a creature of that size. Is that a Chupacabras? I don't know. But it was something. It was not an Opossum, as there was no gray in the fur, no naked tail, and it moved completely differently. The sighting didn't last long. I remember feeling bad for them actually, as though I had disturbed their privacy. I got the impression they were either siblings or a mated pair. They gave off no sense of menace or evil.

"Strangely, I did feel as though they were sentient somehow, different than just an animal, and their heads were quite large, with the rounded, side mounted ears of a primate. It's just strange. I looked for them after that, but never saw them again."

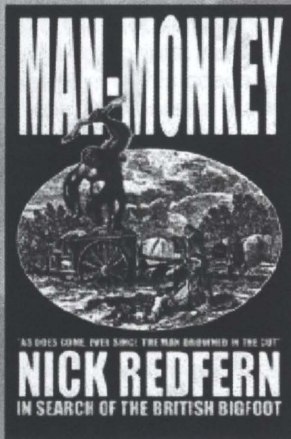
Then there was the story of Wes, who contacted me after I had highlighted at There's Something in the Woods a puzzling werewolf-style encounter that had occurred in central England in May 2007. According to Wes, "I encountered a werewolf in England in 1970. I was twenty years old when I was stationed at RAF [Royal Air Force] Alconbury. I was in a secure weapons storage area when I encountered it. It seemed shocked and surprised to been caught off guard and I froze in total fright. I was armed with a .38 and never once considered using it. There was no aggression on its part. I could not comprehend what I was

seeing. It is not human. It has a flat snout and large eyes. Its height is approximately five feet and [its] weight [is] approximately 200 pounds.

"It is very muscular and thin. It wore no clothing and was only moderately hairy. It ran away on its hind legs and scurried over a chain link fence and ran deep into the dense wooded area adjacent to the base. I was extremely frightened but the fear developed into a total commitment of trying to contact it again. I was obsessed with it. I was able to see it again a few weeks later at a distance in the wooded area. I watched it for about thirty seconds slowly moving through the woods and I will never forget my good fortune to encounter it, and to know this 'creature' truly does lives among us."

These are but a small portion of the many and varied reports that have reached me in the past few months, and I look forward to sharing the details of other reports in a future article. Adios for now, my friends!

Nick Redfern's book *Man-Monkey: In Search of the British Bigfoot* is published by CFZ Press and is available now. And a jolly good read it is, too. Or, as Nick himself, in his broad Brummy brogue, might put it, the book is veritably "bostin' loik." Nick can be contacted at his website: www.nickredfern.com



AQUATIC MONSTERS LOG BOOK

BY OLL LEWIS

NESSIE PINING FOR THE FJORDS?

Upon reading his own obituary in a newspaper Mark Twain sent a telegram saying "the news of my death is greatly exaggerated." Perhaps if the Loch Ness monster(s) were capable of doing the same then we would have been able to forgo the flurry of newspaper articles recently proclaiming Nessie's death.

Apparently, the evidence required for statement was Nessie sightings only being reported twice in national newspapers this year. If I were to use the same system I could exclusively

report the 'sad' passing of the airport docu-soap star Jeremy Spake. Thankfully or not, depending on your opinion on 'theatrical' airport staff, Mr Spake is still with us. Just because someone or something is not reported upon much in Fleet street it does not mean that they are dead, but this fact seemed lost on the reporters that wrote the huge pile of carbon copy reports of Nessie's death currently found knocking around the internet from using this as their sole evidence.

A number of factors can easily account for a fall in reported sightings of a large creature in Loch Ness including; fear of ridicule by an increasingly sceptical press, better education about how to distinguish waves from a large animal breaking the surface of the water or even editors using a story about Paris Hilton to fill up their pages instead believing they'll sell more papers that way.

In all honesty the fact that there have been several reports featured in the press this year from people who believe they have seen the Loch Ness monster is quite a wealth of evidence by the standards of most cryptids. For example before the Lake Windermere monster shot to prominence in the press last year there were no reports about it at all in newspapers but the CFZ have

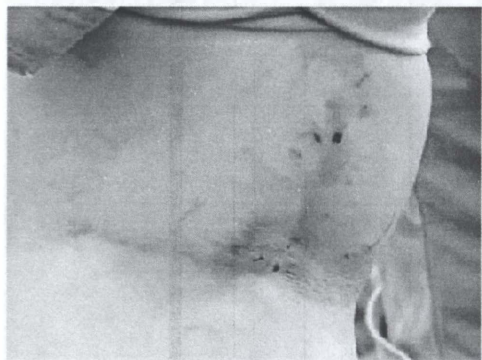


uncovered local sightings going back at least 50 years. Another example is Llangorse Lake where I discovered sightings dating back to the dark ages and photographs of what is the largest pike mask ever to be found in Europe, this creature has never been reported on by the national press. Clearly to declare the Loch Ness monster dead is premature.

PIKE-A-CHEW

Swimmers in Lake Wildenau, Braunau, Austria are thinking twice about going in the water after a series of attacks by a pike nicknamed 'Jaws' by locals.

One swimmer named Margot Kidder who was attacked in August said "It chased me all the way to the bank biting my leg.



I had to have stitches in the hospital. It was terrible."

Local authorities have advised people not to go in the water until local anglers have caught the fish, which according to translations of the original story from Austria is around 1.50m (5ft) long.

However, following the publication of photographs of Margot's scars some people have speculated that the piscine perpetrator of peril may have been a zander.

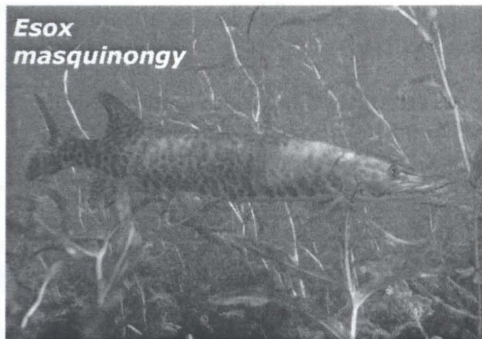
CAMERON LAKE MONSTER

On the 30th of July Bridgette Horvath was driving past Cameron Lake in Ontario when she spotted a large wake in the water. The wake was apparently not caused by any boats, she insists there were none in the area, and when she got out of her car to take a closer look she noticed that there were two other similar wakes close to the one she had spotted from her car. The wakes were all moving in a circle, which Horvath said looked similar to "how whales school up fish".

There have been similar sightings in the lake for decades. Local resident Louis Verheyen has run a resort on the shores of the lake since 1980 and has had



*Esox
masquinongy*



between 30-40 people asking him about the creatures and reporting their sightings to him since then. A few weeks before Horvaths sighting a man approached Verheyen claiming to have seen something that looked like a row of car tyres and another time a fisherman made a sharp retreat from the lake having seen something enormous appearing on his fishing sonar. In another of the sightings, reported to Verheyen in the mid to late 80's, workers from a mining company were canoeing on the lake when the calm service of the lake erupted with large waves and eddies. Verheyen has not seen anything strange on the lake himself but his daughter, Sandra, witnessed several

strange disturbances on the waters surface when she was growing up there and she and her friends nicknamed the creature Bloop-bloop. Another local Colleen Locke also claims to have seen a wave that looked similar to a boat wake in the mesotrophic lake when there were no boats nearby last year.

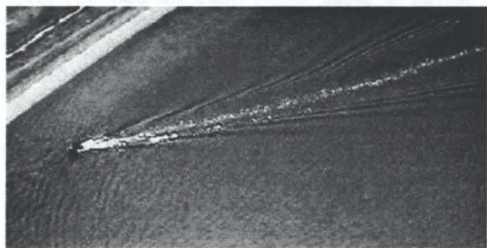
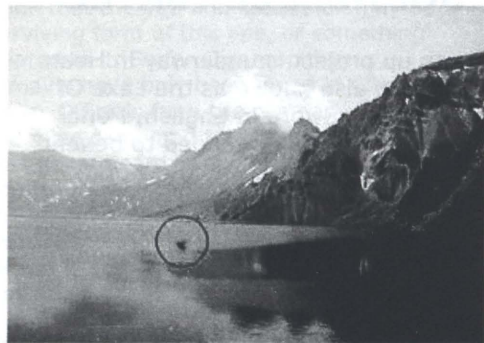
It is possible that the waves, if they do have a biological cause, could have been caused by muskellunge pike (*Esox masquinongy*) which is thought may very rarely grow to over 5 foot and are known to be present in the lake.

CHINESE MONSTER MOVIES

In recent months videos of monsters have surfaced in two Chinese lakes. The first of these lakes in Lake Kanasi, in July, where a swarm of at least 15 objects can be seen moving fast across the surface of the lake making V-shaped wakes. The video then looks at an apparent close up of one of these objects, which looks like a large fish surfacing and going under the water.

Lake Kanasi monster





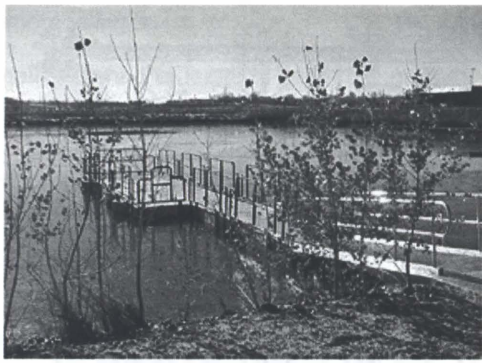
Lake Tianchi 'monster': On the photograph (top) and upper still image from the video (middle) you can clearly see the silhouette of a waterfowl flapping its wings, in the lower still (bottom) the waterfowl's shape is clearly visible.

Chinese scientist, Yuan Guoying, believes the animals may be very large examples of Salmon and there are claims by locals that sheep, cows and horses have been dragged underwater to be devoured by the super salmon for decades. A video of a Chinese news report featuring the edited footage can be seen on You Tube.

The second Chinese lake monster video was filmed in Lake Tianchi near the border of North Korea in September. According to Zhuo Yongsheng, who filmed the animals and is also the director of a local TV news station, the video shows five seal like animals frolicking in the water and speeding through it producing V-shaped wakes. Still shots from the video confirm the wakes were not produced by boats. In fact the animals in question appear to be nothing more spectacular than waterfowl. In one still wings can be clearly seen behind the 'head' of the animal and in another taken from the front one can see its beak without the need to zoom into the picture.

CLOSE THE GATORS!

In July an o-o-p alligator was responsible for the temporary closure of Jayhawker ponds in the city of Loveland, Colorado, USA. The reptile was seen by ten-year-old Josh Peck, who was night fishing with friends when the 5-7 foot long alligator attempted to come out of the lake and onto the dock but fell back in. After the incident park officials were



working with Larimer County animal control and the Colorado division of wildlife on a capture plan, however as there have been no updates on the situation since, the animal is presumably still at large.

MONSTER RUMOURS SENT DOWN THE DRAIN

In September rumours of a monster inhabiting a reservoir built for a new hydroelectric power plant in Hongxian reached the ears of Chinese officials. Local residents had been frightened by nocturnal 'mooing' sounds for the two weeks since the reservoir had been completed and filled and were convinced that a lake monster had taken up residence there.

Chinese local governments take matters such as this a lot more seriously than Western governments it seems and came up with a foolproof way to either squash the rumours or capture the mysterious moo-er; they drained the whole reservoir. Nothing was found in the empty reservoir and it is more than likely the mooing sound

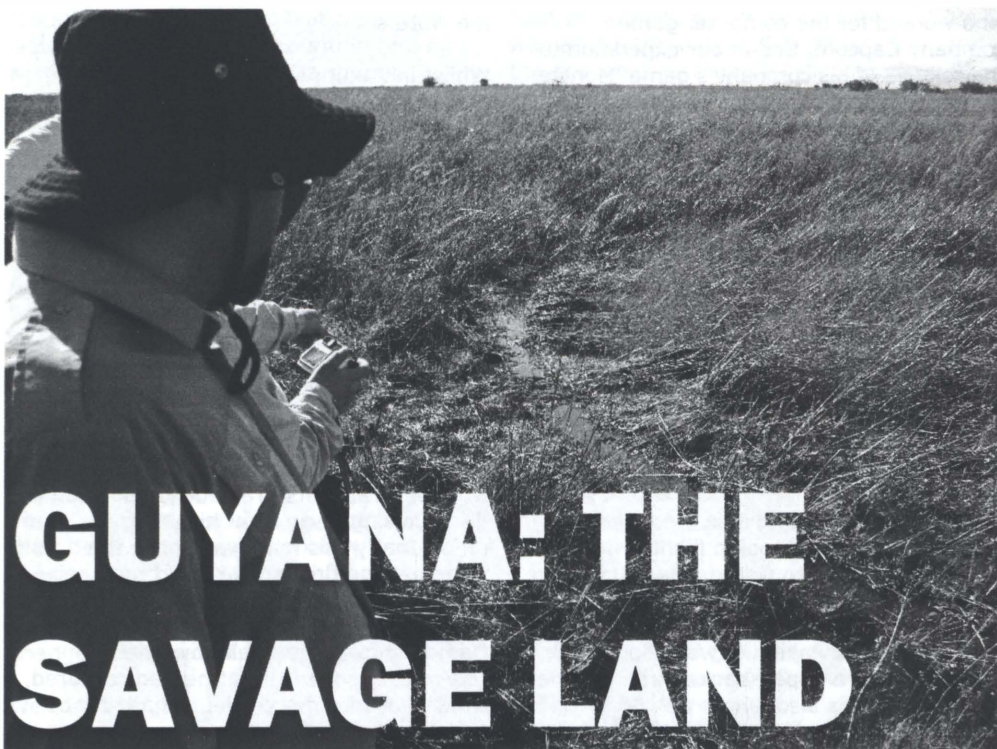
came from the machinery of the new hydroelectric power plant.

GOOD NEWS FOR WORLD'S LARGEST SOFT-SHELL TURTLE

A clean up project is underway in Hoan Kiem Lake, also known as the Lake Of The Returned Sword in English, Hanoi, Vietnam specifically intended to benefit its most famous resident; the worlds largest soft-shell turtle. The project hopes to use new technology developed in Germany to suck up the toxic gunk from the lakebed without particles of it entering the water. The turtles carapace is 6 foot long and although its age has never been determined some locals believe it to be over 600 years old which, even for a turtle, would be phenomenally old.

Legends say that the soft-shell was the same turtle that was responsible for the naming of the lake when it snatched the sword of Vietnamese hero-emperor Li Loi ostensibly to return it to the Gods after Loi had used it to save the country from the Chinese.





GUYANA: THE SAVAGE LAND

The Centre for Fortean Zoology's expedition to Guyana had its genesis with an entry in Michael Newton's excellent *'Encyclopaedia of Cryptozoology'* on crypto-tourism. In this book, he mentioned a company called 'Guided Cultural Tours', which offered expeditions in search of giant anaconda in Guyana.

A man called Damon Corrie runs 'Guided Cultural Tours', and he told me that the company specialises in showing people the true Guyana of the native peoples. Damon is a chief of the Eagle Clan of the Arawak Amerindians, and as well as being a well-respected figure to the native peoples, he also is a conservationist who breeds and studies Guyanese reptiles and invertebrates.

Damon told me that only last year a gigantic anaconda had been seen at a remote pool, known as Corona Falls. He had

spoken with the hunters who had seen the beast, and they had told him that it was so large that they had fled from it. When he asked how big the snake was one, of the men pointed to a 30 foot palm tree. He told Damon that a dead tree of the same size had been lying in the water. The anaconda was crawling over it and its head and tail extended beyond the ends of the tree. This would make the snake around 40 feet long.

Damon also mentioned the di-di, which is a large hairy creature seemingly akin to the yeti or sasquatch that had been seen in Guyana, and also told me more vague stories of dragons that are said to inhabit the mountains. The CFZ decided to mount an expedition in search of these creatures.

For the first time ever, we were able to secure some outside funding. Sam Brace,

who worked for the computer games company Capcom, tied in our expedition to the release of his company's game 'Monster Hunter Freedom'. Capcom kindly donated a substantial sum towards the project.

As well as myself, the team included Dr Chris Clark and Jon Hare who had been on several past expeditions, Lisa Dowley, who had joined us on the previous year's trip and was acting as photographer and archaeologist, and Paul Rose, aka Mr Biffo. It was Paul's first such excursion. He is a TV writer, author and most importantly the man behind the sadly defunct 'Digitiser' on C4 teletext. It was a collection of bizarre non-sequiturs that had Jon Downes, and I, in tears of mirth for several years.

We left Heathrow airport on Wednesday, 14th November and took a flight to New York, and then on to Georgetown. Upon our arrival in Guyana's Georgetown airport, we were met by Damon, who took us to his native village of Pakuri. It was a long and bumpy ride in an open-backed truck to the village. Pakuri is also known as 'St Cuthbert's Mission', but Damon, who is a champion of Amerindian Rights, encourages all to call the village by its original name. It takes its name from the Pakuri tree. Damon showed us the last such tree in the area, the others having long since been cut down.

Pakuri seemed like a content and stable community, unlike the filthy and crime-ridden Georgetown. We took a swim in a nearby creek, the waters of which is stained red by the tannins from the leaves of the plants along its banks. Once in the wine coloured waters it gives the illusion of turning your skin red. Damon told us that small caiman and anaconda were sometimes seen in the creek, but, thankfully, the infamous candiru (*Vandellia beccarii*) was absent from

the waters.

Whilst in Pakuri, we were told of a di-di encounter that had occurred only two years before. It happened in another Amerindian village some 30 miles north of Pakuri, when two children - a boy, and a girl of about 12 - were walking home from school across the savannah. What the boy described as a 'huge hairy man' stepped out of a stand of trees, and grabbed the girl. She was never seen again. There was no police investigation, but this is not surprising as the government of Guyana seems to care very little for its native peoples.

We heard about another man from Pakuri who, several years previously, had seen a di-di walking away from him, but unfortunately this man was not in the village at the time so we could not interview him.

Damon showed us a rainbow boa (*Epicrates cenchria*) that he had captured, which was of a rusty colour phase that I had not seen before. We were also shown a new species of green scorpion discovered by Damon, which was so new that it had not been officially described, nor had it been given a scientific name.



Damon's brother-in-law, Foster, told us that several years ago, in a watercourse a few miles from the village, he had seen the trail of a big anaconda. Judging by its width, the creature that had made it would have been far larger than the 20 foot stuffed specimen in the National Museum in Georgetown.

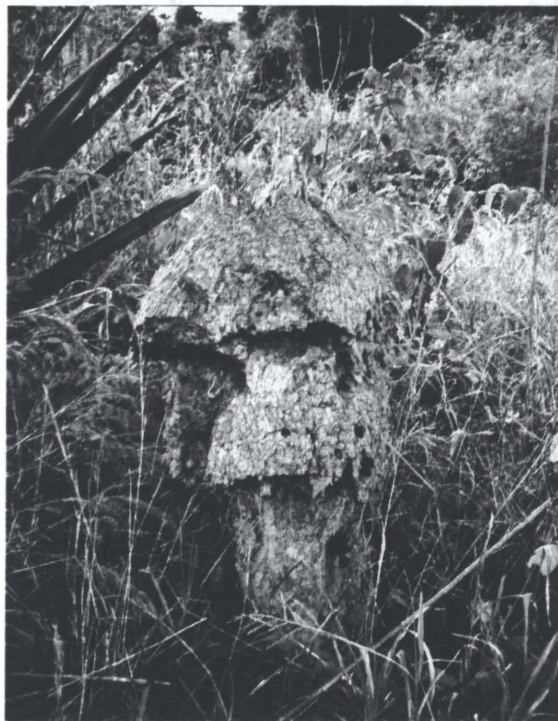
We travelled back to the unpleasant environs of Georgetown to catch a bus inland to Letham, where the expedition proper would begin. Looking as if it was held together by rust, when the coach turned up at the shabby little station, our hearts fell. I seriously doubted that the malodorous vehicle could make the 12-hour journey. The seats were appallingly uncomfortable, and the only air conditioning was via the open windows. It turned out that I was right about the bus as it broke down during the journey. We waited for an hour and a half for a replacement vehicle to arrive. Thankfully

this was a little more comfortable, but it didn't stop this bus also breaking down for a while.

We eventually arrived in Letham, and took an open-backed truck out on to the savannah. On the way, we saw many birds such as caracara, egrets and jabiru. The landscape was very sparse of trees, but scattered with termite mounds that looked for all the world like Christmas trees constructed out of mud. We reached the tiny village of Toka, where we picked up some more guides and porters, as well as several teenage girls who were to cook and wash for the expedition. We then started out towards the village of Taushida. Unfortunately, we were hiking at noon when the sun is at its most ferocious.

The heat on the grasslands of Guyana was quite unlike anything I had ever encountered before. In comparison, the heat of West Africa seems like a chilly winter's day. In Indonesia and Thailand there was shade, but this is a commodity that is lacking in this part of the world. The relentless heat, and lack of shade, affected me badly and I suffered from sunstroke. Several times I collapsed on the way to Taushida - the six miles seemed more like sixty. I had to take many rests, but during one of these I saw a hummingbird at close range. One guide, Joseph, told me that a di-di had been seen in the area. It had resembled a huge white man covered with hair, and had been seen in the mountains, peering through some vegetation.

When we finally arrived, I was able to wash in a stream close to the little village. The cool water was a blessed relief. We relaxed as tiny cichlid fish nibbled on our toes. That night, as we made camp in the village, a bush fire sprang up on the far side of the creek. It resembled a serpent of fire as it grew like some medieval salamanda uncoiling in the night. Thankfully the



flames did not reach over the water to menace our camp.

Unfortunately, we were told that Corona Falls was a full 70 miles away as the crow flies! It would mean walking 20 miles per day, there and back, and as six miles had almost killed us, there was no way we could walk overland in the heat. We considered renting a helicopter when we got back to Letham, but, in the meantime, there was much to see in the immediate area in which we were currently based.

In the morning, we arose early to climb up Makuzi Mountain. Five years earlier, a hunter named Moses Iza had stumbled across an amazing discovery in a tiny cave atop the mountain. In the cooler morning climate, the climb up was relatively easy, but as we neared the top disaster struck. Lisa, who had been following in the path of a much smaller, lighter Amerindian girl, trod

on, what she thought, was solid ground. It wasn't. She fell badly, hurting her thumb, shoulder and the soul of her foot. It looked as if the thumb was broken, as it swelled up like a little sausage. She didn't let the fall deter her, however, and climbed gamely on to the summit.

The remains were located in a shallow cave, and the scattering of flat rocks suggested that the entrance might once have been covered. The remains were in a large earthenware pot, and there was a whole skull of a boy aged between 9 and 12, as well as the jaws and ribs of an adult man. The ribs and jawbones were in a smaller container within the large pot. There were also small beads and the tooth of a peccary. The tooth had a hole in it suggesting that it may have once been a necklace.

Damon did not know exactly how old the remains were. They could have been pre-Columbian, over 500 years old, or as recent as the end of the Amerindian wars around 100 years ago.

Moses related that about ten years ago, a di-di had been seen walking across the mountain. Another guide, a local hunter named Kenard Davis, told us a story that his father had related to him. It happened in the 1950s, when a man had been out hunting and was coming home over the mountains. The mountain pass was quicker than walking all the way around. He was holding two wild fowl he had killed, one in each hand. As he neared the top of the mountain, he looked up and saw a huge hairy man asleep in the trees. He seemed to be using the vines like a hammock.

The man was so frightened that he ran all the way to the bottom of the mountains, still clutching the birds. When he returned to his village, he fell ill and believed that the di-di had put a spell on him. He consulted a shaman who went into a trance to contact the di-di. The creature told him that the man had frightened



himself into sickness. The di-di lived on the mountain, and had a wife and daughter who lived on neighbouring mountains. They did not harm people.

Kenard had never seen a di-di himself, but he did tell us of one strange creature he had encountered. Up until the 1970s, a tiny, red-faced pigmy was well known in the area. He was hairless, naked, brown skinned and about 3 to 3.5 feet tall. He had a red painted face and always wore a strange grin. He would leap out of the bushes, grinning at passers-by and scaring them, though he never did anyone any harm. Kenard's uncle had a motorbike, and the little red-faced man would often hop on to the back and catch a ride. He always leapt off at the same spot, which Kenard's uncle assumed was his home. According to Damon, people left gifts of tobacco out for him.

The food on the expedition was generally good. We dined on chicken, rice, fish and cassava. The latter is a root also known as the yucca (*Manihot esculenta*) which is a major source of carbohydrates. The native peoples shred it, then soak it to remove the toxins. It is then squeezed through a wickerwork tube, before being dried and pounded into a granulated form. Cassava is remarkably filling and a small portion can keep you going for a whole day. It can be eaten in a soft form that is akin to cous-cous, or in a hard granular form that is not unlike granola. In both of these forms, it is quite palatable. However, when turned into cassava bread it has the taste and texture of chipboard.

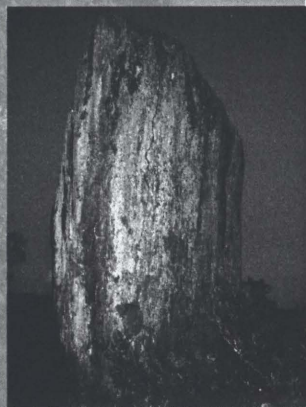
Later that evening, as the sun became less fierce, we travelled in the opposite direction to visit Tebang's Rock. This is a 30 foot, tall pillar of rock that stands on the savannah. Kenard told us of Tebang. He was a little man who walked around at night touching children in order to transmit disease. Once the child had succumbed, Tebang would fashion a flute

from their bones, and play it atop his rock. He was still supposed to be seen on moonlit nights, whistling and shrieking. He seemed to be totally different from the red-faced pygmy Kenard had mentioned previously. Tebang is reminiscent of the African goblin, Tokoloshe; a horrid creature with an out-sized head that wanders the night transmitting illness to children by touching them.

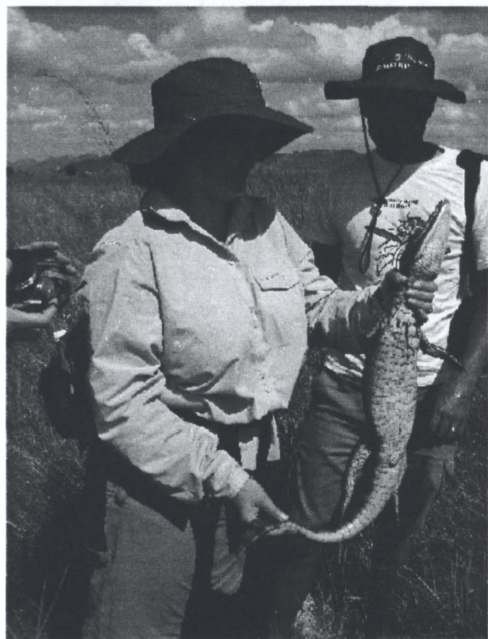
The next day we returned to Toka. The walk went well until the sun reached its zenith, then sunstroke began to kick in again. Once we reached Toka, we all slept in the shade for several hours. On all of our other expeditions we tended to rise at about 7 am, and then trek through the day until about 7 pm. In Guyana, we could not do this on account of the heat - we were forced to stay as still as we could for the middle portion of the day, and this, of course, meant that much valuable time was lost.

That night, I was badly bitten by insects. In the cool morning before sunrise we awoke, and at first light set out in search of anaconda. We found large furrows filled with water going to and from the swamp. They were the trails of anaconda, and by the look of them they would have been 15-17 feet long, which is the average size. Kenard saw a baby anaconda of around 4 feet slip into the water, but the larger ones eluded us.

We followed a line of trees along a partially dried-up creek, but found no anaconda. As the sun was getting higher, we decided to return to camp. Kenard travelled further down the creek, hunting for game to supplement our



rations. He returned, dragging something through the long grass. I thought he may have shot a bird with his bow and arrow, or even a young capybara. He had, in fact, killed a small spectacled caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*). I have always said that I would never eat crocodilian meat, as I am so fond of them, but it would have been boorish to refuse something Kenard had killed specifically for us to eat. The spectacled caiman is in no danger, is sometimes hunted for food, and Kenard had made a clean kill - shooting it through the skull with an iron tipped arrow. It made you appreciate just how tough crocodilians are, as the two-inch iron arrowhead had been bent right round by the caiman's hard hide and bone.



As the sun got hotter, we returned to camp. Jon and Chris decided to walk with Kenard to a ranch a few miles away to get some pop and water. We had all been drinking out of flasks that purified water from streams and ponds. The thought of

pop was appealing, but I also thought they were both insane for wanting to walk in the blazing noon sun.

After they left, the heat began to rise. Even the guides said it was remarkably hot. The sun was truly unbearable. There was no respite in the tents, as they merely magnified the already savage temperature. We poured water over our heads, but that only elevated the heat for a short while. Finally, in desperation, I waded into a swamp and stood under a tree for several hours. The mosquitoes were nothing, a minor irritation in comparison with the solar torture I was enduring. I have always preferred the warmth to the cold. I have always favoured summer over winter, and sun over rain, but on that day I prayed for rain, or even the slightest cooling breeze. Now I have felt the wrath of Guyana's dry season, I will never feel quite the same about cold weather.

That night we roasted the caiman on an open fire. The best meat was to be found in the legs and tail - the legs tasted like chicken, whilst the meat of the tail tasted like very flavoursome, chewy cod. Once again, the insects made a meal out of me.

In the morning, we packed up to move out to Point Ranch, where we were to be picked up by mini bus and taken back to Letham. The walk was long, hot and uncomfortable, especially for Lisa whose injuries were really hurting her.

Whilst we waited at Point Ranch, I asked about the water tiger. An old man called Elmo, who came from the ranch, had seen them. He was adamant that they were not the giant otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*) with which he was familiar. Elmo said that the water tigers he had seen were spotted like a jaguar (*Panthera onca*) but hunted in a pack. He said that there was a 'master', possibly a parent, that sent out the cubs ahead of it in order to flush out prey. He had seen a whole group of them several years ago. Elmo pointed out a local

mountain where he said that a pack of water tigers lived. The mountain had no name, but it was said that a dragon guarded a spring there, and Elmo added that no-one who had ever climbed it had returned. Kenard confirmed that water tiger was supposed to come in different colours; spotted like a jaguar, brown, or white with dark spots.

Another of our guides, Joseph, stated that he had seen the hide of a water tiger killed by a hunter in the 1970s. It was 10 feet long, including the long tail. It was white (he compared the shade with some cows on the ranch) and had black spots. The head was still attached, and he said that it was striped like a tiger.

These descriptions, both physical and of their behaviour, match no known cat species. Lisa thought that the water tiger might actually be a form of giant mustelid, as certain species such as stoats can change the colour of their coats.

We took a truck back to Letham. We had decided that none of us could stand another 18 hour plus journey in a rickety bus, so we decided to fly back to Georgetown when we left. We booked our tickets in advance at the little airstrip in Letham, and whilst there, we enquired about chartering a helicopter. Unfortunately, there was only one in the whole of Guyana, and it was not available. We considered chartering one from Brazil, but this would have meant days of red tape. We also considered a boat, but Kenard said that the river was too low. All of this was amazingly frustrating, as the main thrust of the expedition was to search for a giant anaconda at Corona Falls, and we had not even seen one, solitary, ordinary-sized anaconda so far. The fact that the pool was unreachable was like a dangling the proverbial carrot before a donkey. It looked like we would not be reaching our target on this trip, and we decided to try and return next year, during the rainy season, and charter a

boat or plane to get to Corona Falls. There was an airstrip only half an hour's walk from the pool, but no aircraft available presently.

Both Kenard and Damon mentioned that, during the airstrip's construction a number of years ago, eleven skeletons had been found inside termite mounds. The skeletons were in crouched positions, suggesting that people had broken open the termite mounds, placed the bodies inside them, leaving the termites to rebuild their mounds around the cadavers.

Neither Damon nor Kenard knew of any tradition in any Amerindian tribes that had funerary rights like this, and Damon postulated that it could have been pre-historic. The bones had, unfortunately, been thrown away and no further research had been carried out.

We checked into a guest house again, and that night a herd of horses stampeded through the hotel grounds. None of the locals batted an eyelid! The next day Damon had arranged for us to meet with a former tribal chief who knew a lot about the strange creatures of Guyana.

We drove until the savannah changed to jungle, and then we drove up a twisting jungle path to a clearing near a stream. Waiting for us there, was a middle-aged man in a 'Sideshow Bob' t-shirt, and holding a parang. He introduced himself as Ernest, and told us that he had been a tribal chief until about eight years ago, when he retired to concentrate on running a little fish farm at the base of the Kanaku Mountains.

Ernest was a wealth of information on all of Guyana's monsters, and then some. About ten years ago, and around thirty miles away he had seen a 30 foot anaconda in a pool. He said that it had been shot by an Englishman, and that the skin had been transported to England. This, if it was imported, would have been done illegally. He knew of the di-di, but had not seen one himself. However, a friend of his, who had

died two years previously, had seen a di-di. His friend had seen a female suckling an infant in a tree, and had watched them for a while before blacking out. Afterwards, he fell ill and as his illness became worse and worse, he blamed it on seeing the di-di. He only admitted to the sighting on his deathbed. Ernest said that the voice of the di-di, like a very loud human shout, was still heard from time to time in the Kanaku Mountains.

Ernest knew of the little red-faced pygmies. When he was 19 (he is now 59) he had seen one. It was naked, brown-skinned and had a red face. Unlike Kenard, he felt that the red face was natural pigment, and not painted on. The little man had taken tobacco from Ernest before vanishing back into the forest. He told us that the pygmies are more often seen than heard, that they liked tobacco, and were not dangerous unless angered. They sometimes made homes under large trees, and if one of these were cut down, the pygmies, quite naturally, would get angry. They also made little pots that humans sometimes came across in the forest, and these, too, should be left alone. The pygmies did not speak to humans, even when spoken to - they seemed just to take tobacco and leave.

At the age of 20, Ernest had a run-in with the water tiger. He and his uncle were on a small boat on the river, when something seized the vessel from beneath, and started to shake it. Ernest and his uncle had to hold on to some branches overhanging the river in order to stop the boat overturning. Ernest's uncle said it was a water tiger, though neither man saw the attacker. It could just as easily have been a big calman. He, too, said that the water tiger lived in rivers, and ran in packs.

Ernest's final story was of something that none of us had heard of previously. A couple of years ago, in a little cave at a place called Wa-sa-roo, he had seen a tiny caiman. It was smaller even than the smallest known species, Cuvier's dwarf

caiman (*Paleosuchus palpebrosus*). It was brown in colour, and had a red strip running down its back. The description matches no known caiman species, but stranger than this, he said that the tiny caiman had two tails!

Lizards and snakes have sometimes thrown up freak specimens with two tails due to genetic deformity. However, as far as I am aware, this has never been recorded in crocodillians. Could Ernest have seen a pair of caiman mating, one on top of the other? He did say that the tiny animal was making a very loud bellowing noise, out of proportion to its modest size. Male alligators are known to bellow loudly during the mating season, so this seems like a reasonable explanation. Ernest had also seen the little caiman in a creek near the cave.

We thanked Ernest, and set out to explore Wa-sa-roo. It was a collection of boulders, some of which were house-size, through which a stream ran. I took off my shoes and scrambled into the small cave. It was cool, and had water and ledges. Though there was no evidence in the form of tracks etc., the cave was the perfect place for a small caiman to make its lair. Dwarf caimans like fairly fast flowing, rocky streams, and Guyana could be playing host to a new, unrecorded species.

Later, back at the guest house, Kenard told us some more stories that he had heard of the di-di. Once, many years ago, a hunter found a huge, human-like footprint miles from any habitation. He followed the tracks till they came to a tree, and looking up he saw a huge hairy man sleeping in the vines. He ran away in fear.

That night, we were invited to dine with Ernest's family at their home just outside of Letham. During the meal, Damon mentioned that several members of his family had once worked in the largest open cast gold mine in Guyana. It was once owned by a Canadian company, but has

since been sold. However, they had employed many Amerindians. One time a whole village full of people witnessed the uncovering of a huge, human-like skull. It was far larger than a man's skull, and Damon wondered if it could belong to *Gigantopithecus blacki*, a giant Asian ape believed extinct for 50,000 years. Many think that the yeti and sasquatch may be a surviving form of this ape, or something related to it. So far *Gigantopithecus* remains have only been found in China and India. Officials from the company owning the mine came and took the skull, and it was never heard of again. Perhaps the company was scared of having the mine closed down if a major paleontological discovery was made. Maybe this skull is locked in some bureaucrat's basement to this day.

Foster recalled an even odder story of some man-like creature with webbed digits being swept into a village during a flood. It was described as resembling 'the Creature from the Black Lagoon'. I too have a vague memory of hearing something like this many years ago.

Just what the creature was, if it ever existed, and what had become of it, was unknown. Details were lacking, but Damon was sure it had appeared in the local paper many years ago. There was an on-line archive of the paper, and Paul said that he would check it out when we got back to England. I, too, intend to take a look through the archive when time permits. Rest assured that if I find anything, it will be appearing in the pages of *Animals & Men*. There is a tradition that is widespread in South America of small aquatic beings known as 'Negroes of the Water'. If such aquatic goblins, about whom there is little information, are based on some real creature remains to be seen.

The following day, we caught the tiny plane back to Georgetown. Damon and Kenard had to stay in Letham as they had to pick up some snakes and invertebrates from



Hatchling Cuvier's dwarf caiman at Pakuri;
they have now been released



Creek at Pakuri, in which we swam



*Cave where Ernest reported seeing the
new species of caiman*

remote villages.

Finally, we had to leave to catch the plane back to cold, dark wet England.

So what are my final thoughts? Not getting to Corona Falls, and the giant anaconda lair was a blow. We intend to rectify this in 2008. On the upside, we did turn up fascinating information on other cryptids.

The little red-faced men have never been recorded, or written about, anywhere else to my knowledge. I feel that they could be a type of tiny hominid, related perhaps to *Homo florisensis*. They still seem to be about, but no-one has ever studied them. The di-di may be a bigger hominid, something related to the sasquatch perhaps. If a littlefoot can exist in Guyana, why not a bigfoot? Much of what is attached to them seems like universal folklore. They seem less common now than the pygmies, and it seems that whenever human habitation springs up, they retreat further into the wilderness.

The water tiger, despite my initial suspicions, seems to be very different from the giant otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*). It is social, aggressive and comes in several colour variations. It is a flesh-eating mammal of some kind, possibly a felid or mustelid. Lastly, the tiny caiman. This is intriguing, and could constitute a whole new species. We need to gather more information and eyewitness accounts.

Guyana is a veritable menagerie of cryptids. Few expeditions have looked for these creatures before, so the country promises to be a fertile ground for research for many years to come.

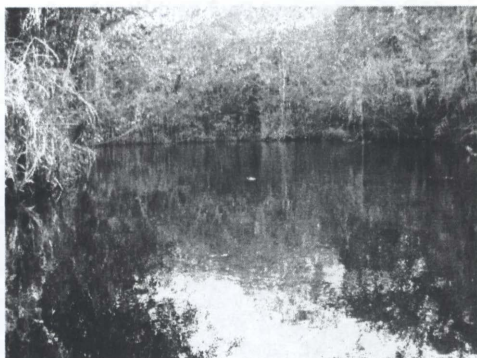
I didn't so much *edit* Richard's narrative, as take a hatchet to it. There are many fascinating stories which I had to leave out, purely for reasons of space. However, his full account, together with the reports from all the other expedition members will be in the Expedition Report, which will be published early in the New Year.



Our dilapidated bus crossing the Essequeibo river



Lisa and Damon in the rocks above the 'Caiman Cave' at Wa-sa-roo



We travelled down this creek by canoe

LOST HORIZON: THE BENNINGTON TRIANGLE

by

Neil Arnold (with the assistance of Joe Durwin)

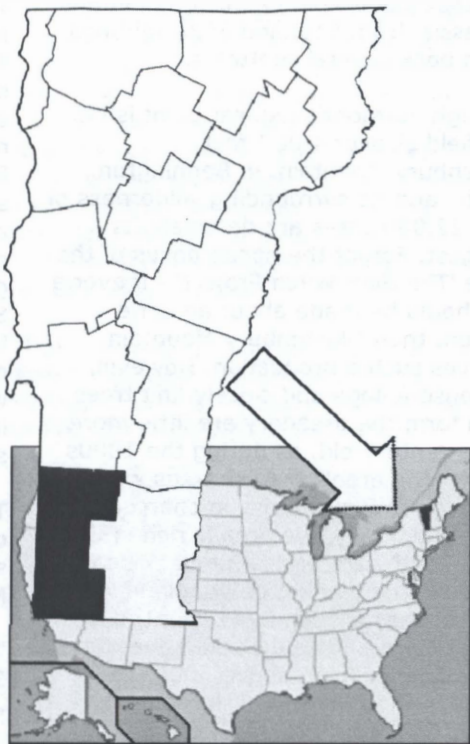
These Green Mountains
Diane Martin - Composer
Rita Buglass - Arranger

*"These green hills and silver waters
are my home. They belong to me.
And to all of her sons and daughters
May they be strong and forever free.*

*Let us live to protect her beauty
And look with pride on the golden dome
They say home is where the heart is
These green mountains are my home.
These green mountains are my home."*

"Entering Vermont for the first time there is a sense of mystic revivification. Something in the contours, something in the setting, has the power to touch deep the viol-strings of feeling which are ancestral if one be young and personal if one be old", spoke H.P. Lovecraft after visiting the state 1927.

Vermont is known as the Green Mountain State, its name originates from the French words 'mont vert', meaning green mountain, and was first seen in 1535 by European explorer Jacques Cartier, but it didn't become a state until 1791. With a population estimated at 609,000, the state is flanked by the country of Canada and the states of Massachusetts, New Hampshire and New York, and covers some 9,615 square miles, and is peppered by thriving industries such as the paper trade and farming. Connecticut, Otter and the West River wind through what is the 45th biggest state of the United States, whilst Champlain (discovered by Frenchman Samuel de Champlain in 1609) and





Legends of the area are rife, and the folklore is as dense as the thickets which grow thicker each year. The Native Americans were said to have been afraid of the place for they believed it to be cursed, possibly because, according to their legend, all four winds met on top of the summit, an area they only used for burials. However, archaeological evidence appears to be lacking to support claims of Indian settlement, and it also seems odd to suggest that possible residents would bury relatives on cursed ground. Yet,

whilst many eerie locations around the world have a mythology built around them, only a minority can claim to match Bennington for factual weirdness.

Memphremagog are its two biggest lakes. Both of these watery abodes are said to be inhabited by large, strange creatures, the most famous of these being 'Champ', of Champlain, a serpent-form that has become almost as famous as 'Nessie' from Scotland with sightings dating back several centuries.

The so-called Bennington 'triangle', as named by researcher Joseph A. Citro in 1992, has been bestowed such a title due to a number of bizarre human disappearances, and an assortment of monster legends that would chill any face around a crackling camp fire in south-western Vermont. Although which areas the 'triangle' covers exactly remains murky, we do know that the ghost towns of Somerset, Woodford and Shaftsbury are very much entangled in the legend, but I do believe that a majority of the surrounding towns and wilderness could easily become roped into the folklore that creeps dark and silent through the mysterious hills.

Although Vermont's highest point is Mt Mansfield at over 4,000-feet, Glastenbury Mountain, in Bennington County, and its surrounding wilderness of some 22,000 acres are definitely its strangest. Forget the hocus-pocus of the movie *'The Blair Witch Project'* - if ever a film should be made about an eerie location, then Glastenbury Mountain deserves such a production. However, the dense foliage and closely knit trees which form the greenery are little more than a century old, as during the 1800s much of the area's mature trees were destroyed to fuel the rise in charcoal trade. Thankfully, the area is rich in wildlife, with rare birds and black bear inhabiting the blanket of woodland which was first chartered in 1761, but the population of people dwindled over time, and has never risen above 300. The census from 2000 stated that only 6 people inhabited the area.

The *New York Times* of 1879 reported on one of the first recorded bouts of strangeness under the headline, A WILD MAN OF THE MOUNTAINS :

'Two Young Vermont Hunters Terribly Scared'

"POWNAL, Vt., Oct. 17 - Much

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excitement prevails among the sportsmen of this vicinity over the story that a wild man was seen on Friday by two young men while hunting in the mountains south of Williamstown. The young men describe the creature as being about five feet high, resembling a man in form and movement, but covered all over with bright red hair, and having a long straggling beard, and with very wild eyes. When first seen, the creature sprang from behind a rocky cliff and started for the woods near by. When mistaking it for a bear or other wild animal, one of the men fired, and, it is thought, wounded it, for with fierce cries of pain and rage, it turned on its assailants, driving them before it at high speed. They lost their guns and ammunition in their flight and dared not return for fear of encountering the strange being. There is an old story, told many years ago, of a strange animal frequently seen along the range of the Green Mountains resembling a man in appearance, but so wild that no one could approach it near enough to tell what it was or where it dwells. From time to time, hunting parties, in the early days of the town, used to go out in pursuit of it, but of late years no trace of it has been seen, and this story, told by young men who claim to have seen it, revives again the old story of the wild man of the mountains. There is talk of making up a party to go in search of the creature."

However, Samuel de Champlain spoke of a similar creature in the 1600s which went by the name of the Abenaki and

also the Wejuk, and although described as bear-like, these beasts walked like a man. And, in her *History Of Lemington* (1815), Marion Daley wrote of Slippery Skin, an elusive hairy humanoid that would prowl into gardens late at night, tear down fences and terrify the local animals such as dogs and cattle. However, the most peculiar incident involving a man-beast took place in Bennington around 1850 - although didn't seem to appear in print until a century later when it was included in a volume of *Green Mountain Whittlin's*. According to the article, on a dark, and stormy night a stagecoach travelling along the, then plank, road of Glastenbury not only had a few difficulties with the flooded ground, but something far more nightmarish. The horses began to act agitated, straining and jolting against the reins before stopping dead in their tracks, unnerving the driver. He, feeling a little concerned, pulled out his gun and dropped to the ground, his path littered by a set of huge impressions in the wet soil, which appeared to be large footprints. As he called to the passengers of his coach to come and take a look, the horses reared up and something crashed into the coach, charging it with such force that it toppled. The witnesses stood in horror as a hulking creature with glowing green eyes snarled loudly, and then loped back into the darkness of the surrounding woods.

Since that terrifying account, freelance writer Joe Durwin who is writing a book on Glastenbury and its strangeness, has

collected around thirty more reports of such sightings across Vermont, with six coming from the Bennington County area, mainly Woodford and Glastenbury, but as statistics go, such reports seem few and far between suggesting that Vermont is not the place to be for man-beast encounters, but this is probably due to the fact that the woodlands are pretty much bereft of humans.

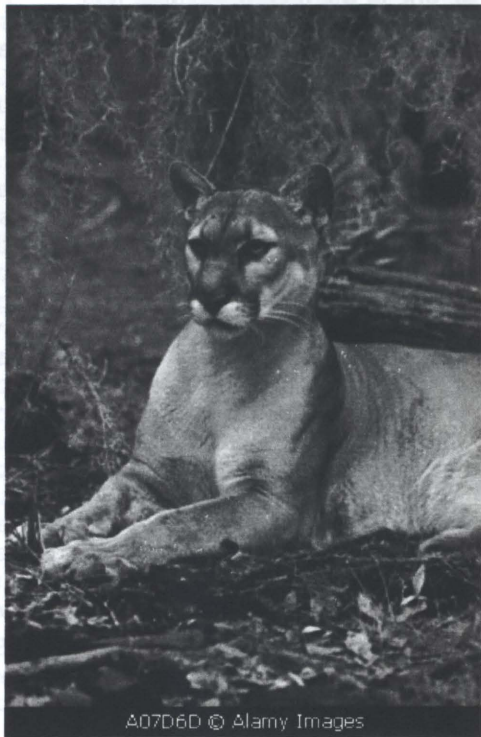
Could the stagecoach attack long ago have involved a cougar rather than a hairy humanoid? Unlikely. Whilst such felids have been known to attack humans in the U.S. and Canada, and do indeed hiss and snarl (but not roar as they are not officially a 'big cat' like the leopard or lion, but the largest of the lesser cats, and so instead the puma screams), they do not walk on two legs or have glowing eyes. Although the eye of a cat will reflect brightly in car headlights or a torch, the beast that attacked the stagecoach seemed to have eyes glowing in the darkness, and not reflecting in any light. It's also unlikely that a cougar, however powerful, could topple a stagecoach unless it was on very unsteady ground.

In 1881 the eastern 'panther', also known as the cougar, puma or mountain lion, was edging towards extinction. A huge puma killed around the time at Barnard was allegedly the last, and was stuffed and paraded through Vermont, with a charge of ten cents aimed at any spectator eager for a peek. The Cherokees called the cat the 'lord of the forest', and despite much scepticism, it still is, and lurks around Vermont today despite the original encroachment of the colonists who wiped clear the natural shelters, which for so long had hidden some of areas most enigmatic animals. According to Mr Durwin,

"There have been over 30 sightings of panther, virtually always referred to as

catamount in Vermont parlance, in Bennington County in recent years, 20 of them logged by the VT Fish & Wildlife Department. There is some kind of breeding population of cats in the Glastenbury wilderness."

What also amazes is how officials can state categorically that an animal as elusive as the puma which evades man for so long in its natural habitat, can be officially wiped from the register simply because sightings are few and far between in areas so dense. Here, we are dealing with an animal with a vast territory that mainly hunts at night, and which has been given the apt name of 'ghost cat' and 'shadow cat' over the years to describe its ease to elude. Despite hair and scat findings over the last few decades, the catamount remains merely the phantom of the



A07D6D © Alamy Images

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woods in parts of the U.S.A. although locals believe it to be there, but sceptics believe that the only cats that could be out there are in fact escaped pets, but Mr Durwin disagrees, *"It's been suggested we might be seeing panthers who've migrated from the western part of North America, where they still thrive in places. Personally, though, I think the eastern variety never went completely extinct, and with the vast reforestation in recent decades we're just seeing the population resurge from the scant few that remained alive in the most remote places:"*

Whilst sightings of large cats and hairy humanoids persisted throughout the 1900s, I would like to take a detour for a moment into the main mystery of the 'triangle'. The disappearances. The most intriguing, sinister, and baffling of all the weirdness which the area has to offer, all the while punctuating these disturbing facts with reports of previously mentioned strange animals.

According to Joe, five people went missing between 1945 and 1950, with four of them vanishing within a five mile radius of each other. Unfortunately, like so many legends, these cases become clouded, exaggerated, and murky, and often altered by the folklore of a certain location, and Bennington has plenty of that. Here are the facts.

On the mild day of November 12th 1945, 74-year old Middie Rivers, who was travelling with four other hunters, vanished without a trace in an area known as Hell Hollow at Bickford Hollow, despite being a very experienced man of

the woods and residing in the area. He'd led the team to Glastenbury Mountain but on the way back to camp, Middie, who'd only pushed on slightly ahead, was never seen again. Although details of such strange happenings often confuse and conflict, it was claimed that the only trace left of the man was a single bullet that had fallen from his belt as he'd knelt to drink some water. Despite extensive searching for a month, parties uncovered no sign of the missing man. Even more bizarre was the fact that there was no sign or noise of a struggle despite Mr Rivers being only a short distance away from his colleagues. Also, if he had been confronted by someone or some 'thing', surely he would have used his gun or alerted the others?

In the October of 1942, a 13-year old Melvin Hills vanished in the vicinity of Bennington whilst playing near his home, but his disappearance, and also that of four hunters in 1949, have never really become connected to, or spoken of, in the same breath as the other casualties.

On December 1st 1946, 18-year old student Paula Welden was hiking along the Long Trail in the direction of Glastenbury Mountain, and then mysteriously vanished. Her disappearance remains Bennington's most baffling mystery. In fact, such was the outcry of the general public when local authorities failed to find her, that in 1947 the Vermont State Police was formed.

According to friends, Paula was a shy

girl with a great future ahead of her. She was keen on art and it was something she wished to fulfil as a career, and she loved the outdoors.

Paula went out at around 3:00 pm on the Sunday the 1st, she was wearing a red parka, jeans and trainers and was picked up by a Woodford man who dropped her off near Route 9, not far from his home. This was only just over a mile away from her destination of Long Trail. Along the trail she came into contact with various hikers, even asking one group if the trail continued over the mountain. At around 4:00 pm she headed north, strolling by the Fay Fuller Camp, and this was the last time she was sighted. It was her roommate the next morning who reported her missing to the dean, and her father who was in Connecticut at the time, came to the dormitory, as a search was organised for her. The search party was huge, involving helicopters and over 400 volunteers, whilst the newspaper coverage that ensued sent out constant appeals, but all to no avail. Despite numerous tips and a huge file of leads, none of them lead to the missing woman, and not even the help of numerous psychic investigators could trace Paula. She had disappeared off the face of the Earth.

On his website, <http://bennington-triangle.blogspot.com> Joe Durwin comments:

"...in February 1947, a Mrs. Champaign of South Hero, told police about a dream in which she saw what had happened to the missing girl. In her dream, she had seen Paula attacked by a man in a black car, who buried her under the floor of a camp along the Long Trail. What is most interesting about this "dream" is that it corresponds closely to an account given by an inmate at Windsor Prison several months later. That September, Lloyd Wilkins told police that Terrance Stone,

another prisoner who had just recently been convicted of rape, had bragged of murdering a girl on the Long Trail. According to Wilkins, Stone said he had buried the girl under the floor of a camp there. Investigators believed that Wilkins fabricated the story in order to have his sentence shortened, and the lead was never seriously investigated. Neither this information nor the tip from Mrs. Champaign were ever made public, making the similarity very curious. Though both pieces of information have been wedged in among the many pieces of memorandum in the case file for more than 50 years, the first person to see a possible connection between them was Mary Findley, a former staff writer for the Bennington Banner who researched the case in the fall of 2000. Findley told me she believes to this day that this could well be the solution to the mystery. Until or unless someone digs under all the cabins along the Long Trail, we will never know for sure."

The other theories are less confusing. One is that Paula simply had an accident in the woods, maybe she became lost, or took a fall, and her body was missed during the search, but surely such an extensive search would have discovered her? It seems unlikely that she simply became so lost considering she'd stuck to the trail and obviously wasn't planning a lengthy hike by just wearing sneakers. Another suggests that maybe Paula never went on the trail and instead met up with a boyfriend and ran away with him, but this just seems a random theory considering she'd already begun the hike and also had little interest in men due to the career she wished to succeed at, and thirdly, and possibly the most sinister of the theories, concerns the possibility that she was murdered, as the woman who had the dream suggested. Serial killers, as we know, are often intelligent and

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methodical people, and if she had been the victim of human predation, was it the same calculated individual who'd been responsible for the Middie Rivers disappearance? Who knows. However, it is a theory that has stuck to the present day, despite no evidence to suggest such foul play. Mind you, two other theories are as equally plausible, but certainly one of the two would only be considered as the last resort for investigators, and that's the possibility that Paula was killed by a Bigfoot, or a similar creature to which toppled the stagecoach a couple of centuries ago. This may sound absurd, especially to those who are not inclined to believe such creatures exist, but it is another of those sinister theories that has made the legend of the 'triangle' what it is today. However, there is another theory which I've not heard, which is that Miss Welden was attacked and killed by a catamount.

There was a light snow on the ground as she began her journey, it was dusk and the previous year a big, black cat was encountered by a Marian Harpan Peduzzi, as she walked along a track in Berlin, Vermont. It was 4:00 pm as she headed home for her dinner, and something caught her eye some 100 yards away in the distance. She thought it was a big dog, maybe a Labrador, until she began to focus on it, realising it looked more like something from a zoo. Shocked by what she was seeing she headed quickly for a friend's house and both women stood and watched the cat which didn't seem at all bothered by two witnesses. The pair became scared when it closed to

within 10 metres and then slinked off into the woods.

Whilst the women were convinced they'd seen a black 'panther', confusion arises when identifying such a cat. Across the world there are sightings of large cats in places where they should not be. Australia, United Kingdom and parts of Europe frequently have sightings of large animals, and most of the time these are of the puma and the black leopard, which people know as the black 'panther'. However, in the U.S.A. and Canada, the 'panther', as we have already established, is the catamount (puma, mountain lion). Black pumas do not exist, despite constant reports in the press in which they confuse the black leopard with the puma. In the U.K. there are many who do not realise that leopards can have a dark pigment to the coat which makes them look black. This pigment is known as melanin, and is common, but in the puma it does not occur. The puma is fawn-tan coloured, whilst the term 'black panther' does not describe a species of cat, it is merely a term to describe the black, or melanistic leopard, native to parts of Africa and Asia, which would not breed with a puma. Of course, this doesn't explain then why black leopards are seen in the U.S., Canada and United Kingdom, but what does explain this predicament are the laws which have been introduced in some countries which state that should an owner of a black leopard, or puma want to keep their animals then they should pay a license fee. In the U.K., when this act was passed in 1976, many

owners let their animals go, which explains the abundant populations of puma and black leopard now.

Also, cats were once imported by the Romans and used to fight slaves in amphitheatres, add that to a steady influx during the Victorian era of menagerie escapees, as well as circus escapees, and there you have your answer. The same could also be said to explain the black cat sightings in the U.S. Black leopards were very trendy animals to keep during the 1960s and '70s, and those released into the wilds once they have mated, will only produce black offspring which explains why there are no sightings of normal spotted leopards. In the U.S., this would possibly confuse witnesses. Residents know that pumas once existed, but possibility don't, or never have realised that other species of large cat also roam the woods. So, when they see a big, black cat, roughly the same size as a catamount, but with a dark coat, they immediately jump to the conclusion that they've seen a black 'panther' but the reality is, it's a black leopard. And there is certainly enough wildlife in the U.S.A., Canada, Australia, the U.K. etc to support a wide variety of exotic felids which clearly are establishing themselves.

Across the world eye-witness reports and evidence for the existence of large cats roaming places they are not indigenous to are common, but attacks on humans are extremely rare, and non-existent with regards to fatal attacks. In the U.S.A. however, people have been killed by the catamount.

The Sunday Mirror - Sunday 11th January 2004: 'LION KILLS CYCLIST':

"A mountain lion was shot after mauling a man to death and dragging a woman 100 yards with her head in its mouth. Rangers hid near the body of cyclist Mark

Reynolds, 35, waited for the lion to return to its prey - and then killed it.

The beast also attacked Anne Hjelle, 30, a fitness instructor. The animal pounced on her as she cycled with her friend, Deborah Nichols, in parkland outside Los Angeles.

It sank its jaws into her head and dragged her 100 yards into a bush while Miss Nichols held on to her friends legs. Miss Hjelle is now in a serious condition in a LA hospital.

Describing last week's attack, Miss Nichols said: "I held onto her and kept screaming and screaming. The lion just wouldn't let go of her face."

Other cyclists fought off the animal by throwing stones at it."

December 1st 1949. Three years to the day of Paula Welden's mysterious disappearance, and 68-year old James Tedford also vanished in bizarre circumstances. The man, a war veteran from Bennington had got on a bus from St. Albans and was travelling home after visiting friends, but never got there, despite being seen on the bus, and yet never being seen getting off the vehicle! Witnesses even claimed that he was on the bus at the stop just prior to his final destination, yet he never turned up. The only trace of the gentleman was his bus schedule, which was lying on the seat he'd been occupying.

Although such a case never received as much publicity as that of Paula Welden, it's as equally baffling, yet possibly not as sinister. The guy had literally vanished into thin air on a bus. It is this case which attracted the attention of several UFO buffs and experts who believed, and still do, that Bennington had become something very similar to the famous Bermuda 'triangle', where planes and boats have gone missing over many years, never to be found.

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The folklore surrounding such a peculiar disappearance, and lack of evidence to support the more to down to earth suggestions, had many theorising that Bennington was some kind of interdimensional trapdoor where people were slipping through a tear in the fabric of the atmosphere, but where these people end up remains unknown. Others claimed that the victims were being abducted by alien craft, because, like so many other states in the U.S.A., UFOs were being observed in the skies over Vermont.

The following year on October 8th, 1950, 8-year old Paul Jepson was playing outside his home in North Bennington as his mother went about her usual daily routine. However, when the woman went to check on her son, there was no sign of him. Although it is claimed that the lady left him unattended for an hour, he boy was wearing a red jacket, which would have made him noticeable, had he been seen wandering the streets. Bloodhounds were called to the scene and seemed to pick up his scent, but when the animals reached the highway they lost the trace, suggesting he may have been picked up in a vehicle.

At the end of October things got even weirder.

Vermont's Somerset Reservoir was the destination on this particular Saturday for Frieda and Max Langer. They'd travelled from North Adams and set up camp in the woods with Herbert Elsner, cousin of Mr Langer. Joe Durwin takes up the story, "*Frieda was an excellent woods-woman, and she and Mr Elsner*

set out at around 3:00 pm hunting partridge, leaving her husband back at camp a short distance away. At around 3:45 pm Frieda had a minor accident and slipped on some wet rocks, soaking her clothes and so Herbert walked her back towards camp, leaving her around 150 yards away so that he could return to the woods to finish off his hunt before darkness fell. However, once Herbert's stalking was over, he returned to camp around 5:00 pm, alarmed to notice that Frieda wasn't there. Max told him that she had not returned."

The two men, rather concerned, searched the woods for a good hour or so, but to no avail and so reported that Frieda was missing to the caretaker of the area. By the evening, several men including woodsmen and forestry officials, were combing the area, and this search leaked into Sunday, with all involved growing increasingly worried for the safety of Frieda. Of course, only three weeks previously a child had mysteriously disappeared and the previous folklore of the place was no doubt on the mind of everyone as they trekked through the woods. A day or so later, and the press also became involved, everyone scratching their heads wondering just how an experienced woods-woman could become lost so close to camp, in daylight!

The strain of the mystery took its toll, especially when Mr Elsner and Langer became suspects for a short while, but polygraph tests and lack of motive and evidence, ruled them out as suspects.

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Appeals via the press also turned up nothing except one very strange eye-witness testimony, that of cab-driver John Gale from Boston who claimed to have seen Frieda Langer near town but she appeared bigger in the face than she'd appeared in the press appeal photographs. Also, he claimed, she'd spoken to him, commenting, *"Right now, I'm supposed to be lost in the Vermont woods."* Strange indeed.

Whilst Mr Langer confirmed that his wife had had a brain tumour over two years previously, he did not believe it was connected to her disappearance. And so, troopers from every part of the state were called in to pain-stakingly search the woods, leaving Attorney Edward John to comment, *"We've got to crack this one. The public is demanding it."*

Helicopters, private planes, members of the public, national guardsman, police, and boats on the reservoir, more than 300 people involved, searched high and low, exhaustively for over a month before bad weather put paid to consistent combing of the area. The search was pretty much called off, and the case died. And then something happened.

During the May of 1951, the body of Frieda Langer was discovered. It was like a peculiar break in the folklore of the place, but it was still a grim finding, yet a mysterious one at that. Joe Durwin wrote:

"Her partially-decomposed body was spotted by two hunters in a swampy spot 3 miles downstream on the East Branch from the reservoir and Langer's camp. The body was lying on its back, badly decomposed and waterlogged. One hand was missing and barely more than a skull was left of her head. Her heavy clothing kept much of the rest of her body intact and helped make identification. John, accompanied by a coroner and some troopers, lead by the hunters, reached the spot with night falling, and proceeded to examine the body and scene for less than an hour.

From this point Attorney John and other officials began shaping a verdict that seems to glaze over several facts and leave more questions than answers."

They said that Frieda died of accidental drowning, which may have been caused by the brain tumour, but the facts were, although Frieda did in the past suffer dizzy spells, the tumour had been removed two years previously, and since



then Frieda had not had any fainting episodes. What also remains bizarre is that even if Frieda had fainted, she was so close to camp that any kind of search would have easily discovered her body. Also, the stream was not deep, and unless the search was carried out extremely inadequately, it seems impossible to suggest that the combing of the area could have missed her. It also does not explain who the cab-driver saw that seemed to resemble a bloated Frieda Langer.

As no foul play was ever suspected of Frieda Langer, she was not given an autopsy. She remains the last person to have officially gone missing in the area.

Over a five year period, starting in the August of 1956 at Devil's Gate Reservoir in Pasadena, California, three children mysteriously vanished and were never found. The location, adjacent to Oak Grove Park Road, is merely a rocky canyon around fifty-feet in depth that used to be bombarded by floods, with the water crashing and swirling around the gate area. During the 1950s the place was associated with the dark arts. The dates of the three separate disappearances suggest that someone unhinged may have abducted or killed the children in cyclical fashion, also evident in the cases of the Bennington disappearances.

In 1925 it is alleged that horror author H.P. Lovecraft, travelled to Richmond, Vermont due to the appearance of a curious creature locals dubbed 'the awful' a terrifying winged critter spotted atop buildings, swooping through the skies like some dark, leathery dragon of fantasy. The beast was said to possess the tail of a serpent, grey wings and huge claws. Legend has it that one local man saw the beast and on the spot had a heart attack. Possibly the same beast, or maybe a relation, was seen in Berkshire

just a fortnight after the sightings in Richmond. The winged horror was buzzing the skies near Lost Nation Road and searching for prey. Some believed it had taken a small child although others suggested that the prey within its claws was in fact a small animal like a lamb, or dog. The flying terror plagued the area for three years and then the sightings of the form ceased. And then some 81-years later in 2006, the beast had allegedly returned. It was either an apparition, or a relation to the original leathery monster. This time it was seen to pluck a crow from a tree, but at the time of writing, sightings have been few and far between, but there seems to be a worldwide menagerie of 'awfuls' waiting in the wings.

During the winter of 1989, a man from Lamoille County found a set of huge footprints in the snow measuring 14 inches long. Thirteen years previous an East Haven woman saw a muscular creature covered in hair whilst she was camping. In 1990 several campers heard horrifying screams as they rested in Green Mountain National Forest. Four years later at Chittenden County one of three youngsters playing hide and seek at the Essex Junction, at around 10:30 pm, shone a flashlight across a field and picked out a hairy humanoid creature that sped gracefully across the field and hid behind a storage barn.

Five years later in September 1999 at Rutland County, near Lamontagne Road, a young man had a terrifying experience at his home whilst getting ready for bed. It was around 2am when the witness went to the bathroom and, upon returning to his room, heard a heavy breathing outside his open window. When he looked outside he could see a tall figure in the road. He described it as looking like a gorilla, but walking like a man. He estimated its weight to be over

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then strolled up the road swinging its arms in an unusual manner.

In 2003, at 7:10 pm, a Winooski man from Bennington was driving along Route 7 - dusk was falling like a grey haze, as he returned home from Southern Vermont College where he'd been visiting his daughter. Suddenly, at the highest point of the route, he saw a man-like figure, dark in colour walking across the ridge. He noticed it was covered in hair and had very long arms and headed towards Glastenbury Mountain. District Chief Dane Hathaway of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department claimed that what the witness had seen was in fact a bear, despite the fact that the man had been an avid hunter since the age of 15, and certainly knew his animals.

Three weeks later a similar humanoid was seen on the same stretch of road at 7:00 pm.

On July 23rd 2005 between 10:00 pm and 2:00 am, at Bennington County, a man and his wife camping heard a series of strange screams in the woods, made by an animal that seemed to come closer and closer to their camp as the night wore on. Despite shining a flashlight into the woods and calling back to the creature, which responded, the screamer refused to show itself, but made itself known also by snapping twigs and making a thumping noise. The witnesses had their 75 lb Labrador dog with them, but the poor animal was reduced to a shaking wreck, terrified by the screams that surrounded their camp, forcing the couple to sleep in their car with a shotgun at the ready. However, the

screams seemed to cease when a patrol car sped on through.

During the April of 2006 the *Rutland Herald* reported a cougar sighting from the Pittsford area. One of over twenty reported throughout the year to officials. The witness, a woman named Pam Smith, saw the animal in the field next to her home. She watched the creature through her binoculars and told the paper, "It was just milling around." Although local officials took the sighting seriously, they were still hesitant to confirm that the woman had seen a cougar, despite the fact she fully recognised the animal that was even watched by other witnesses.

So, can the whole mystery of the Bennington area be put down to a sum of various parts such as a cougar attack, a serial killer on the loose, a rampant Sasquatch and natural causes? Whilst a cougar attack is possible, it, and in fact none of the suggestions, can explain how Mr Tedford vanished into thin air whilst travelling home on a bus. It also doesn't explain why Frieda Langer vanished, and then mysteriously turned up, although her injuries - the skull damage and her missing hand - could suggest an attack from a large cat, or unknown biped. However, if a hairy humanoid creature killed at least one of these people, we must then ask why there haven't been other disappearances or murders of a similar nature in other woodland areas of Vermont. It doesn't

add up.

So, was a serial killer on the loose around Bennington during the 1940s? Possibly, when you consider that many killers often hide bodies of their victims, with many never being found, but the only way the serial killer solution could have been investigated was by an autopsy on Frieda Langer. Had the campers been stalked whilst at their destination and then, as darkness fell, the killer made his move on Frieda. However, if this is the case, why didn't the alleged killer kill Max Langer who was on his own longer than Frieda, or was this just mere opportunity? Killers of course can be very random as well as methodical, but as Frieda was the only body to be discovered, there is nothing for investigators to compare, and once again, that lack of an autopsy really puts a dent into any further investigation.

Maybe all the disappearances were simply coincidental and not related to any kind of killer, creature or bizarre phenomena, whether alien abduction, or something akin to a Bermuda Triangle oddness. Maybe Frieda Langer was washed downstream and the search party just simply missed her bloated corpse. Maybe young Paul Jepson was simply abducted, his innocence lured into a passing vehicle.

Yet what of Paula Welden, setting off for an evening stroll, never to return? Was she killed and eaten by a bear or plucked from the air by a prowler who buried her body in the forest?

None of these cases tie up. It's as if these people just walked off the face of the Earth, all within close proximity to one another and also within a region that just happens to host a series of other legends.

It's unlikely that we'll ever know the truth, or decipher the core element that makes Bennington and its 'triangle' such a weird and eerie place.

Right across the United States there are locations that seem to be weirder than others. West Virginia, Ohio, Illinois, and Wisconsin to name a few, have all been considered window areas where strange things are said to filter through, whether in the form of strange creatures, bizarre apparitions or unidentified flying objects in the sky. However, many of these mysterious locations are known for their supernatural qualities, fantastic events with folkloric connotations that seem to occur but leave no trace, in turn causing healthy debate and scepticism.

In the case of the Bennington activity, there is certainly a degree of this, but also the alarming truth that very real people have mysteriously disappeared in a fashion that suggests something more than coincidence is at work, and they also, in their seemingly normal lives, for some unknown reason, have left no trace either.

With many thanks to Joe Durwin without whom this would not have been possible.

His blog on the mysteries of the area can be found at: <http://bennington-triangle.blogspot.com>

He also has a book coming out called *IN THE SHADOW OF GLASTENBURY THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE BENNINGTON TRIANGLE*.

OTHER SOURCES:

Xprojectmagazine.com
VirtualVermont.com

weird weekend 2007



woolfardisworthy
north devon



What is involved in organising a Weird Weekend?

Well, copious cups of tea or coffee for starters.

As soon as the doors close for the last time on each year's event, preparations are already under way for the next year's this year was no different and speakers have already been booked for 2008.

Lessons are always being learnt procrastination and tardiness are *not* good. Not only do speakers need to be booked in plenty of time in order to fit in with their own busy schedules, but travel arrangements, and accommodation, need to be booked as far in advance as is possible. Stock needs to be re-ordered, and props need to be made - sound checks need carrying out, and rehearsals need to be undertaken.

Interspersed with all this, the normal everyday functioning of the CFZ needs to carry on, which means that book orders still need to be checked daily, parcelled up, and dispatched as soon as possible.

Membership subscriptions to both *Animals & Men* and *Exotic Pets* need to be kept updated, with magazines sent as, and when, is necessary. Apart from this, there is the ongoing work on the next issues of both magazines that needs to keep churning over. And, of course, there are always books waiting in line to be proof-read, and there are those in line still waiting to be finished.

Added to all this, the resident animals all need their daily requirements adhered to, the men (and woman) of the CFZ need feeding with a crust of bread - at least - on those occasions when there is no time to prepare and cook a proper meal - or when there is no proper food as we have not had time to organise any shopping. (sympathy here please, come on: 'awwww'). There are still personal appointments to be kept, a garden that needs tending, and washing that needs doing, and so it goes on.

The cottage can get overcrowded at times, and to be perfectly honest, yes

CORINNA DOWNES

this can be very hard you must remember that I came from a house that consisted of basically just me once the girls had left home. Any peaceful ideas of a quiet cottage in the country, although only ever really just an idyllic thought, have all but gone - along with those days when you could saunter across the landing in the nude on the way to the shower, because there was no-one else there to see you!

However, I digress slightly. Since being involved with this rum lot, and during these last few months since I have been at the cottage permanently, I have seen that, in times of pressure, every single one of its occupants pulls together and gets things done. There is a dogged silence as people go about their allotted task. As in everything, there are tasks that we are given that we may not particularly want to undertake, but we do them, and if we do complain we mutter it under our breath well most of the time. Blimey, that was all a bit cheesy wasn't it? I don't do cheesy. Excuse me while I vomit into my waste paper bin.

Enough of that.

The line-up this year was pretty spectacular, but the arrival of one of our star speakers, in particular, was eagerly awaited. Things did not go exactly as had been planned, but in the life of the CFZ, I suppose this was not to be entirely unexpected!

We had arranged tickets for the arrival, on the Wednesday before the event weekend, of Grigoriy Panchenko, from the Ukraine. He was flying from Hannover to Zurich, and then from Zurich to Birmingham, and was due to arrive at just gone 1.00 pm. Lisa Dowley had offered to pick him up from the airport on her way down from Manchester.

That morning, Jon, Richard and I were due in Barnstaple to give a radio interview for BBC Radio Devon at 11.00 am before going off to do various bits of last minute shopping including some food for the evening before the arrival of our guest.

We were just eating a hurried lunch in the car, before attempting to negotiate the crush around Morrison's for our last shopping task of the day, when Lisa telephoned to say that there was still no sight of Grigoriy. This was very worrying, especially as it was now around one and a half hours since his flight had landed. Lisa had put a call out for him but with no success. Also due to the stringent data protection laws try as she might, Lisa could get no information out of any of the airport staff as to whether our guest was indeed on British soil yet.

The trip to Morrisons was abandoned and we rushed back to base, whereupon we set about trying to ascertain what, if any, information we could find out by telephoning various airlines, airports etc etc.

My allotted task was to phone Birmingham and see if I could persuade them to let us have information that they would not normally divulge. This, I knew, to basically be an impossible task as they have the laws to uphold, and although Jon was expecting me to put on my worried, concerned wife-at-home, voice I didn't, in the end, actually have to resort to doing such a thing. The lady I spoke to was, in truth, most helpful she understood the situation and asked me to ring back in ten minutes whilst she contacted Immigration to see if our visitor was being held up there. I was extremely grateful for her helpfulness,

as I am no actor yes I have performed to an audience but that was many years ago and I am not sure that dancing on point whilst wearing a tutu would actually get me very far down the telephone anyway.

Time went by, and I duly telephoned again but, unfortunately, she confirmed that Grigoriy was not there. Now this posed a big problem there seemed to be four possibilities: he had changed his mind, he had suffered an accident, he had missed his connecting flight, or he had missed Lisa and had wandered off into the bowels of Birmingham Airport perhaps even to find a taxi to bring him all the way down to North Devon!

What on earth were we going to do?

The Data Protection Act is there to protect people like you and me from the weirdos wandering around out there, but in situations like this it can work against you - big time.

Poor Lisa was still stuck at Birmingham Airport - she had been there since 11.30 that morning don't forget - and was getting no luck at all with bureaucracy on site.

This, however, is where it all changed. I suppose if I was poetic I would write something along the lines of 'the dark clouds lifted, and the sun sent his warming rays upon our aching heads'.

The very helpful lady at Birmingham Airport gave us a number for the Swiss airline on the off chance that they may be able to help shed a little more light on the problem. She warned us that they would probably not be able to divulge names etc., but it was another number to contact.

I explained the situation again, this time

to the lady down the other end of the telephone at the airline. She asked me the flight details, times, name of passenger etc and, believe it or not and I had to check this with her a couple of times as I could not believe it myself she actually confirmed that Grigoriy had missed his connecting flight (for 'whatever reason') and was on the next one due to arrive at Birmingham at 18.15 that evening. It was so easy! If only we had had access to this particular number in the first place! As I say, they were so helpful, I had to check again that she was really confirming that he was on the next flight.

Lisa was informed - poor lass - that shw would have to remain at the Airport for another three hours or so but at least we had located our missing Ukrainian! Our thanks go to Swiss Airlines!

At 9.45 that evening, Lisa and Grigoriy arrived at CFZHQ to a resounding cheer of relief, and heartfelt thanks to Lisa.

It transpired that Grigoriy had missed his connecting flight at Zurich because he had set off a minor 'security alert'! Now, Mr. Panchenko is a quiet, unassuming man and not one you would think would set off such an alarm. However, he was carrying, in his pockets, a pair of metal hand exercisers (I am not sure what the correct technical term is) and these had set off the alarm at the airport. Poor soul.

Our other star speaker, Peter Robbins, and our old friend, Larry Warren, had said that they would arrive early on the Thursday morning, after travelling overnight however, we were not expecting early to mean 5.00 am! LOL - yikes!

There *really* is never a dull moment at the CFZ!



The CFZ cocktail party is held on the Thursday evening every year to officially launch the Weird Weekend. And this year, as usual, we all had a great time, met some new friends and were all present and correct the next morning sans headaches! No hangovers here folks!

However, the evening was not without its spills. Poor Jon hurt his foot no he was not under the influence (and I mean that most sincerely folks) - in fact, Mark did exactly the same thing, at exactly the same spot, but escaped injury. Our garden is not the best lit of its kind in the dark, and Jon tripped over one of the guy ropes to the gazebo and landed awkwardly on the lawn, twisting his ankle.

I was up at 7.30 am as usual (blowing my own trumpet again there) on Friday morning, and made a start on clearing up. Matt Osbourne, and his friend Pixi (and her daughter Katie) were the first of 'the crew' to arrive, and immediately got their sleeves rolled up and got stuck in. By 10.00 am, with the added help of Mark, Oli and Peter Channon, the place was spick and span again.

Jon's ankle, after being rested overnight, had blown up like a balloon and was most uncomfortable. However, he had

some first aid administered (from our resident first aider Matt Osbourne), who confirmed that bones were all as they should be. A tubigrip was applied, and Jon was told to rest the foot as much as possible.

Now, anyone who knows Mr. Downes especially at this time of the year will soon realise that the last instruction was not going to be adhered to for very long. He was soon in the office, checking his emails and sorting out what needed to be done by whom, and when. He was under strict instructions from 'er upstairs to put as little weight on it as possible, and had been threatened with pointy sticks if he ignored her. (Well he was the one who insisted on adding the 'obey' bit in his vows as well so he was jolly well going to adhere to them lol aha hoisted by his own petard.)

As normal, it was Open Day at CFZHQ on the Friday, so the barbeque was lit and we eagerly awaited visitors here to show them around our collection of animals and have a friendly chat. Another speaker, and old friend of the CFZ - Ronan Coghlan - arrived from Ireland, and, throughout the day, others continued to appear.

Everything was going reasonably well



until one of our guests took a turn for the worse. He should not really have come, but had brought a friend with him to look after him whilst he was here and thought it would be OK. After refusing medical help he did, however, have to leave in the end, and was taken back to his home in South Devon.



Aside from this, visitors were coming and going, together with various speakers and other guests arriving at Barnstaple station, facilitating pick-ups.

The doors at the Community Centre were due to open at 6.00 pm that night, and at last it was time for everyone to make his, or her, way down to the Community Centre. For a short period of time, there was quiet in the cottage. Time for me to savour a cup of coffee at last. By the way, Jon's foot improved through the day thank goodness, so, come the evening, he was able to 'do his thing' without too much trouble. The lights went down, Jon made his introduction and the show began - it is not very often you see a dragon in Woolery, but this is exactly what greeted those present, when a special dragon dance was performed by some children from the village. The dragon that Mark, Richard and I had made held up well, and looked very effective in the lasers and smoke.

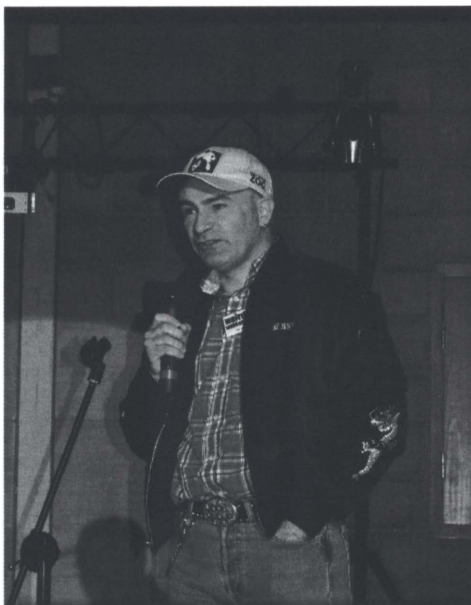
The rest of the evening went very well and ended on time, allowing us all to return to our beds at a reasonable hour, in order for us to get a fresh start in the morning. However, at 3.00 am I looked at the clock and thought to myself, 'hmm I am supposed to be up tomorrow to write a blog entry, send an important

text, make sure the cakes get to the hall, find my 'dressing-up' frock for the Mad Hatter's Teaparty, and locate some plastic bags.'

Despite a very late bed time, by 9.30 on Saturday morning, I had at least managed item two on the aforementioned list! Saturday at the Weird Weekend is, by nature, the busiest day of the event. Doors open at 10.30 and close around midnight.

This year, it was no different. The household was all up and ready to go very much like a regiment of soldiers on parade. Jon acting out his much-loved role of Sergeant Major with rather *too* much relish. This year, though, he played his part from the bed, as, after a night's (or, rather, half a night's) sleep, his foot was giving him gyp again. To this end, he had decided to let it wake up a bit before trying to put weight on it, and hobble downstairs himself.

Young David was up and down the stairs



plying us both with coffee and toast, whilst I attempted to write Friday's blog, and whilst Jon's aforementioned appendage recovered its equilibrium.

By the time I arrived at the Community Centre, all was in full swing and the lectures commenced as scheduled and all went smoothly. The children had their Mad Hatter's tea party followed by a UFO talk with Peter Robbins. They all sat, full of cake - and goggled eyed - and seemed to enjoy themselves thoroughly.

Dr. Karl Shuker had been billed as attending to launch his new book that we have just published - *Extraordinary Animals Revisited*. He had warned us, however, that he may not be able to come as he had just returned from a holiday in Brazil the day before and was not certain whether he would be able to make the long journey down here from the West Midlands. But he did and all the copies of his book that we had in

stock were soon signed and sold to eager fans. Nick Redfern had also been down originally to give a lecture, but had had to pull out at the last minute due to travel from Texas suddenly becoming impossible for him. In the last few days before the Weird Weekend kicked off, this situation changed, but it was not until Thursday evening that we knew that he would definitely be able to make it. So, after around 29 hours of no sleep and having to drive himself from Gatwick Airport, he finally arrived at the Community Centre to be ushered into the auditorium as our surprise guest.

As happens every year, the timings ran slightly over time, and the schedule was tweaked a bit, but this did not really matter and at 11.00 pm the talks finished, leaving everyone somewhat exhausted, but pleased with how the day

had transpired. After a convivial hour in the bar, refreshing parched throats with a cooling drink, we all dispersed to our relevant board and lodgings. As an aside, we also appeared to have someone sleeping in our shed we have no idea who it was, but upon trying to locate Richard's top hat earlier on that afternoon (for the Madhatter's Teaparty, before you ask) I found a sleeping bag and some clothing strewn around. All very peculiar!

Once back at the cottage, it was time for the traditional Saturday night Weird Weekend banter with those who were staying here. We eventually got to bed at 3.30 am!

As I blundered downstairs the next morning in my usual desperation to locate the kettle, I found - upon the



dining room floor - what appeared to be two very large pupae. Would these split open and produce two giant butterflies of astounding beauty? Nah it was Jon McGowan and Darren Naish asleep in their sleeping bags.

Anyway, everyone was up and out in good time for the start of the programme. Well I say everyone I was the last out, but my excuse was that I had to finish my blog and make sure that there was no-one in the house who could accidentally be locked in all day. In my defence also, it took three attempts at leaving the cottage the last occasion culminating in me partaking in some kind of weird ballet with the CFZ dog, Tessie. This can be easily explained. I was in such a rush that it was not until I had closed the garden gate behind me that I realised that I had, in fact, passed her on my way out. I hate to admit it, but I did actually have to step over her. I had registered her presence, but my brain had not reminded me, as quickly as it should have done, that she should, in truth, have been on the inside of the back door and not standing by the back gate. Oh well, it is an age thing I guess.

Other than that, all went extremely well at the Community Centre and at the end



of the last talk we were only around 10 minutes behind schedule which, as I am sure you will agree was not 'alf bad, considering.

Nick Redfern gave a talk about the subject matter of his new book, *Man-Monkey*, which was then officially launched. Unfortunately, as we had not expected him to be there, we only had a small stock of his book available, but those who bought it were thrilled to go away with a freshly signed copy.

The other speakers on Sunday were Paul Vella, Larry Warren and Peter Robbins, Darren Naish and Ronan Coghlan, with Jon giving his keynote speech to end the proceedings. There was a hive of activity clearing up, a refreshing diet coke at the bar and then we were off to the local pub, *The Farmer's Arms*, for the traditional end of event dinner.

This was only my third Weird Weekend and by all accounts from the veterans, it was the best yet. Hopefully next year's will be even bigger and better and, as I wrote at the beginning of this, we have already booked several speakers for it.





Letters to the Editor

The Editor and his band of merry men welcome an exchange of correspondence on any subject of interest to readers of this magazine. We reserve the right to edit letters and would like to stress that opinions voiced are those of the individual correspondent rather than being necessarily those of the editorial team or the Centre for Fortean Zoology. Every attempt is made not to infringe anyone's moral rights or copyright, and we apologise if we have unwittingly done so.

HITHERTO UNREPORTED OWLMAN SIGHTING?

Hi.

I suppose this would be of interest to Jonathan Downes, since he wrote the book.

Right, well, this is strange. I'm a skeptic, completely, and don't usually have time for anything that doesn't have anything more than anecdotes behind it. However.

Someone just posted a question on an internet forum I belong to, and it dredged up some memories. The question itself was about Mothmen, and lead me to the wiki page on that phenomena.

The description made me remember something.

When I was perhaps about ten years old (I'm sorry, I don't remember exactly. If I was ten, that would mean the events took place in 2000), I was with my best friend playing in the field across the road from her house. It was summer, and it was dusk (so I guess the time would've been about 9pm). We were playing quite happily, something to do with hiding behind a wall - I don't know why I remember that, or why it is relevant. I also remember I had tomato soup for dinner - and suddenly my friend froze, and then jumped behind the wall. She said she had seen glowing red eyes above the gate, on a darkly coloured animal. I think she mentioned claws.

The thing is, the story gets hazy here. I know I looked, and I remember being terrified of what I had seen, but for the life of me I can't remember anything of what I actually saw. I remember trying to decide if we should run or stay in the field until her parents came to find us, I remember that in the end we decided to hide. I remember spending hours, once we were back at her house (her parents did come get us), trying to rationalise what we had seen - that it was car brake-lights, that it was two people with red torches. I know her parents didn't believe us and thought we were just trying to scare her brother. But I still can't recall what I saw, just that I was afraid. We saw it once more that night. We looked out the window and there it was, sitting in the branches of a tree that must've been about 20 feet off the ground. No one but me and her saw it.

So, with those memories returned to me, and me thoroughly freaked out, I clicked every available link in the wiki page. First, it appeared mostly to young girls - check, we're both female and she, a couple of years older than I, was just entering puberty. But the bit that, Jesus Christ, made me unbelievably freaked out, was that her house was in Cornwall. Anywhere

else and I would've shrugged it off as childish mind games and false memories (which, of course, it might be anyway), but I had no idea there were such sightings in Cornwall. I'd never heard the stories before, and I lived there up until two years ago.

I suppose this information isn't the best ever, since I don't remember actually seeing it, and I don't even remember when it was, but I thought maybe it'd be worth sending this anyway.

Unfortunately, I've completely lost touch with my friend; her family moved, and she is at university, though I don't know which one. I can't get a hold of her side of things. And though this 'sighting' was in Cornwall, it wasn't Mawnan, or even in the Kerrier district. She lived in Gunnislake (Caradon). Her house/the field was very close to the river Tamar, separated from it by the trees

that line the river bank, and further up the hill is the church.

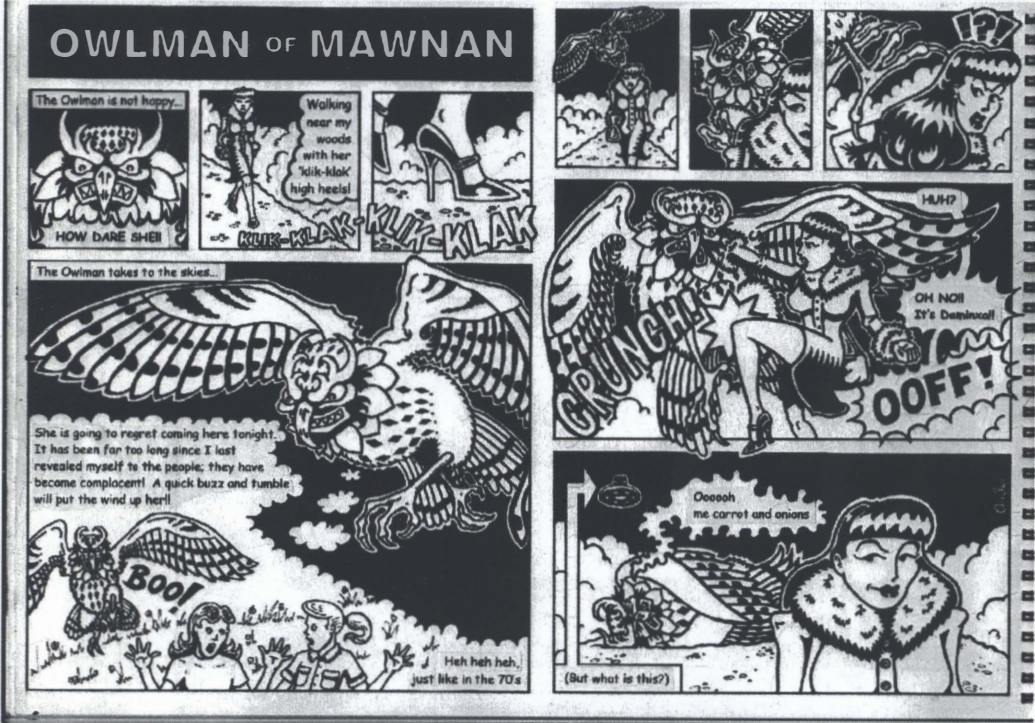
Okay, I think that's all the information I can have. You can e-mail back some questions if you want, or not. I'm doing this anonymously, so just call me 'Anny'.

Thank you for your time,

Anny.

Editor's note: It is intriguing how the fortean universe works. This is the first new owlman sighting which we have received for some years, and it arrived in my eMail inbox on the same day as this cartoon from Peter Heasman - the newest member of the A&M team.

But, as Tony Shiels once said to me "There's no such thing as a coincidence".

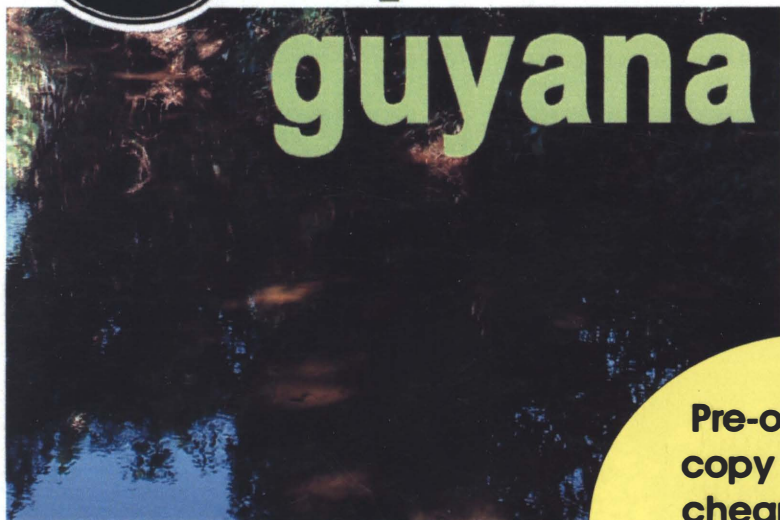




THE CENTRE FOR FORTEAN ZOOLOGY

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